



New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation

# FORCES

Friends of Recreation, Conservation, and Environmental Stewardship

Spring 2025 Newsletter

Vol. 10 Issue 1

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The FORCES mission is to engage New York State college students to simultaneously improve OPRHP resources and enrich student academic, recreational, and career opportunities.

## FORCES at Our Core

Tom Hughes, Environmental Stewardship Biologist  
Central Region FORCES Program Manager

Often, when people think of NY State, they think of the 'Big Apple' with New York City being the center of it all. But, NY's real geographic core is actually in our Central and Finger Lakes Regions, where our FORCES program first grew from. In this issue, we continue to highlight the many people, projects, and partnerships in our program's foundational regions, with an extra focus on activities occurring within the Finger Lakes and Great Lakes/Lake Ontario watersheds. For example, please read all about how students, faculty, and staff from Finger Lakes Community College (FLCC) have connected with FORCES in our 'Alumni Spotlight' with NYS Parks' Biologist Charlie Ippolito (page 2) and in our 'Partner Highlight' with Muller Field Station (pages 8-10). We are so thrilled by these ongoing successes, and they will continue to be the "big apple" in our eyes ;)

This past fall, FORCES team members and Stewards were again out in the community and at conferences sharing our program's mission and exploring new collaborations. In October, FORCES presented at the Great Lakes Commission Annual Meeting in Rochester, NY (photo lower left). Of special note— as a result, our FORCES team now has regular conversations with staff from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources who are engaging high school and collegiate students in similar ways. Also, in November, two more of our *Audubon in the Parks Stewards* traveled to Washington, DC for the Great Lakes Fly-in (photo lower right).



(L-R) FORCES Jr. Stewards Nandika Rajaram & Matias Romano, Amy Kochem, Tom Hughes, Ron Rausch (NYS Parks Deputy Commissioner of Environmental Stewardship), and Erika Jensen (Executive Director at the Great Lakes Commission) at the Great Lakes Commission Annual Meeting in Rochester, NY on October 9, 2024. Photo: OPRHP



(L-R) Magdalena Godofsky (SUNY ESF student), Brian Smith (Citizens Campaign For The Environment), Connor Jacobs (*Audubon in the Parks Steward*), and Erin McGrath (Policy Director at National Audubon Society) Photo: Erin McGrath

## Alumni Spotlight: Charlie Ippolito

Environmental Stewardship Biologist, Finger Lakes Region



I've always been drawn to the outdoors, a connection that ultimately led me to FORCES and shaped my career. Growing up, I spent countless hours exploring a nearby forest, catching critters, and learning about them. This love for nature grew with me, and as I finished high school, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in the environmental field, but I wasn't sure where to focus. I enrolled at Finger Lakes Community College to study Environmental Studies, initially thinking I'd work with fish or wildlife. That changed when I met my professor and advisor, Bruce Gilman. He taught dendrology and field botany, and during a winter walk in the campus woodlot, he identified tree species with what seemed like a superpower. I was captivated and became fascinated with plants from that point forward.

It was in May of 2017 at 19 years old that I discovered the FORCES program through a mutual friend, Emma Kubinski (featured in the Summer 2024 Alumni Spotlight segment). We bonded over our shared interest in plant identification, and she encouraged me to apply to become a FORCES Steward at Ganondagan State Historic Site. There, I worked alongside

Stewardship Project Coordinators Kira Broz and Kyle Webster, who introduced me to the world of habitat restoration and invasive species management. Under their guidance, I gained hands-on experience mapping invasive species, applying various removal techniques, and learning about the native flora impacted by invasive plants. Restoration projects, where we removed invasives and replaced them with native plants, became a key part of my internship and solidified my passion for this work.

Kira and Kyle's mentorship was transformative. They not only deepened my love for plant identification but also taught me the broader significance of maintaining healthy ecosystems. Their lessons on the environmental impacts of invasive species and the importance of restoration continue to guide me today. The skills I developed during my time as a FORCES Steward—surveying land for invasive populations, prioritizing areas for management, and restoring landscapes with locally sourced seeds and plants—formed the foundation for my career.

Now, as a biologist for NYS Parks, I've had the opportunity to apply what I learned during my internship to large-scale projects. One that stands out is our work at Chimney Bluffs State Park, funded by a Sustain Our Great Lakes grant. In 2020, we discovered that swallow-wort had nearly overtaken native plants along the bluff trail. Using management techniques I first learned as a FORCES Steward, my team worked to remove the swallow-wort and restore the Great Lakes bluff community with native plants. FORCES Stewards played a crucial role in this project's success, assisting with invasive species surveys, planting native flora, and engaging with park visitors to explain the importance of the work.

Reflecting on my journey from intern to biologist, I'm grateful for the foundation FORCES provided. It not only gave me practical skills but also instilled a mindset of continuous learning and a deep appreciation for the natural world. My advice to current and aspiring FORCES participants is simple: you get out what you put in. Take initiative, ask questions, and embrace every opportunity to learn. These experiences can shape your future in ways you might not expect, just as they did for me.

*"As an Audubon in the PARKS Steward I was responsible for participating in conservation efforts for the Great Lakes piping plover. This position fit my expectations very well with many additions in terms of variety of what I both did and learned. This made me very happy to experience, as it is a very beneficial addition to my broad range of personal and professional knowledge moving forward. I learned things from the history of the Great Lakes piping plovers in New York to emerald ash borer biocontrol methods."*

~ Austin Simko, SUNY ESF



## Coordinator's Corner

Amy Kochem, FORCES Program Coordinator

We started off the fall semester with our 9th Annual FORCES Membership Gathering at Filmore Glen State Park. The morning started with a gorge hike led by Josh Teeter, followed by a pot luck lunch in the sunshine. Dan Hughes, FL Stewardship Project Technician, presented on emerald ash borer biocontrol. Then we headed for bioindicator creek surveys with benthic macroinvertebrates. We concluded the day with a blessing to the Earth and dispersing native seeds.

Our 2024 edition of the FORCES *Who's Who* that highlights 38 FORCES Stewards and two Jr. Conservation Stewards from the Niagara, Finger Lakes, and Central Regions has been published on the FORCES web page, go take a look!

FORCES is gearing up for a busy spring season. We'll be hosting our 10th Annual FORCES Summit on April 6th at Green Lakes State Park in Fayetteville. Stay tuned for more details! We encourage you to like our Facebook page and connect with us on Instagram and LinkedIn!



9th Annual FORCES Membership Gathering at Filmore Glen State Park.

### Contact Us

Amy Kochem  
FORCES Program Coordinator  
amy.kochem@parks.ny.gov  
Lorenzo State Historic Site  
17 Rippleton Rd  
Cazenovia, NY 13035  
(315) 976-4092

Carlin Shew  
FORCES Program Specialist  
carlin.shew@parks.ny.gov  
Finger Lakes Office  
2221 Taughannock Road  
Trumansburg, NY 14886  
(607) 387-7041

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**\*Denotes FORCES Clubs**

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Liverpool High School  
Nottingham High School  
Orleans/Niagara BOCES  
Ossining High School  
Pittsford Mendon High School  
Pittsford Sutherland High School  
Sandy Creek High School  
Scarsdale High School  
Waverly Central School

## Featured Project: 2024 Prescribed Burn at Ganondagan State Historic Site

Carlin Shew, FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region

A 130-acre prescribed burn was held at Ganondagan State Historic Site on October 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> this year, marking the 5<sup>th</sup> burn collaboration between OPRHP Regional Management, Environmental Stewardship and local municipalities. Finger Lakes Regional Biologist Whitney Carleton acted as Operations Coordinator and Public Information Officer. Biologist, Charlie Ippolito oversaw Trail Closures. The team worked closely with Burn Boss, Bill Edwards, from Star Tree Wildfire Protection LLC. The Town of Victor including Victor and Fisher, NY Fire Departments, Victor Schools and Victor Highway Department all worked as stakeholders and assisted with operations. Star Tree Wildfire was assisted by staff from the Albany Pine Bush and Region 8 Department of Environmental Conservation. Eric Stuart worked alongside Park Police to provide Park Rangers for road closures on Murray and School Roads and led the road closure operations day-of. FORCES Program Specialist, Carlin Shew, assisted with day-of spectator management and volunteer coordination. Friends of Ganondagan Liaison Ansley Jemison captured the burn on film, interpreting the significance of the project.



Fires burn high and fast through the Hickory Unit adjacent to County Rd 41 on Day 1 of the prescribed burn. Photo: OPRHP



Stewardship staff, trail-closure crew, and public spectators gathered for debriefing by Bill Edwards. Photo: OPRHP

The trail-closure team consisted of Regional Trails Crew staff members, Student Conservation Association (SCA) Stewards, FORCES Program Stewards, and local community members who reported to the Environmental Field Office building at 9:30 am Day 1 of the burn for a debriefing. Volunteers, Staff and Stewards were given their posts and instructions for the day including a briefing on *why* this management was occurring- an important part to communicate to our patrons, especially those local to the area.

### Why do we prescribe burn at Ganondagan?

The objectives of the prescribed burn are to:

1) Establish warm-season grasslands and oak savannas that reflect the historical landscape of the late 1600s when the Onöndawá'ga (Seneca people) were living at Ganondagan.

2) Reestablish fire as an ecological driver and management tool on the landscape to support biodiverse native plant communities described/observed in reference ecosystems.

3) Support target grassland breeding birds by maintaining open grassland habitats.

4) Increase the regeneration of oak, hickory, and understory flora in forest and savanna communities.

5) Enhance connectivity of ecosystems sitewide, reducing hard edges across habitats (Continued p. 5).



FORCES Conservation Steward, Alicia Menduni, in front of the Ganondagan Long House and Three Sisters Garden during the burn of the Pollinator Unit. Photo: OPRHP



## Featured Project: 2024 Prescribed Burn at Ganondagan State Historic Site (Cont'd)

Carlin Shew, FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region

The timing of *when* fire is prescribed to a site can significantly change the outcome of the burn. For example, fall burns promote forbs. Forbs are a name for plants that are herbaceous (not woody, like shrubs) and broadleaf (not grass-like). The most common forbs are wildflowers, especially perennials like the diverse species of asters, goldenrod, and milkweed that pepper the grasslands of Ganondagan. The promotion of a wide diversity of wildflowers is what we hope to see after a fall prescribed burn and will provide support for a wide diversity of wildlife including pollinators, nesting birds, and small mammals.



Spectators observing the burn from the Bluestem Unit.  
Photo: OPRHP



Post-burn section of the Oak Unit showcases the nature of fall burns, moving underneath a patch of Canada goldenrod and leaving the native species' seeds in-tact. Photo: OPRHP

During fall burns, the fire largely stays low and burns through the thatch layer, which is made up of dead and living stems, leaves, roots, and other organic material that haven't broken down. Occasionally the fire will make its way up the dried stems of goldenrod and other forbs, but for the most part the tall stems will stand protected above the fire as it moves beneath and through, burning the layer below. After the fire clears, the perfect setting is created for our native plants, like New England asters, dogbane and common milkweed, to drop their seeds into the newly bare soil, free from crowding and competition by non-native species like vetch and other low-growing vegetation.

This team effort took a lot of time and energy on behalf of everyone involved. A big thank you goes out to all who assisted with this project from start to finish!



Charlie Ippolito overseeing the Hickory Unit burn. Photo: OPRHP

*"I believe my experience will help me professionally because having any kind of field experience opens up work possibilities. I will look like a better candidate for internships/jobs when I have experience with an official program like FORCES."*

~ Amonette Sellers, Ithaca College

## Central Region Update

Mike Serviss, Stewardship Biologist, Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Project Coordinator, Delaney Kalsman, Stewardship Specialist, Cara Gannon, Assistant Environmental Educator



AHTF Fern Crew members Alexis LaFever (left) and Bailey Thieben (right) plant an AHTF at Chittenango Falls State Park. Photo: OPRHP

We celebrated the end of an era on the American hart's-tongue fern (AHTF) propagation and reintroduction project in 2024—or rather a change of state! Federal funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative as administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ended as scheduled in September 2024. Seasonal Fern Crews planted just shy of 800 AHTF across four sites during the five-year funding period. To put that in perspective, there are only roughly 4,000 total AHTF in all of New York State! Overall survival of all transplanted AHTF over the years and months following reintroduction is 66%, which is more than three times greater than previous efforts over a similar period of time. Other highlights of the project included removal of over 100,000 invasive plants from AHTF habitats, successful trialing of tissue culture propagation methods for the species (a first!), creation of a living AHTF terrarium on display at the Clark Reservation State Park Nature Center, morphometric analysis of four wild AHTF populations, and censuses of eight out of nine

wild AHTF populations under OPRHP management. However, work on the project is not done! We plan to transition to state funding to continue the project. Future project goals include annual monitoring and data collection of reintroduced AHTF populations, continued invasive species management, continued education and outreach programs, and media creation. A huge thanks is owed to the dozens of OPRHP staff, FORCES interns, volunteers, and partners that contributed to the conservation and continued existence of this imperiled species in New York!

~Mike

We began a Shoreline Stabilization Project at Sandy Island Beach State Park, while also indirectly beginning to restore piping plover nesting habitat. In total, we transplanted more than 3,000 American beach grass and 90 dune willow out of piping plover habitat and into a 600-foot dune blowout. The project became a partnered effort with Parks, Student Conservation Association, St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (SLELO PRISM), and local volunteers. Our team hopes to continue the project this upcoming spring.

Education and outreach for piping plovers persisted, with the team tabling at Southwick's Music on the Beach festival. We got patrons involved in our first ever corn-hole trivia game and it became a huge success, reaching over 70 people.

Moreover, the Piping Plover Program attended the Oswego County Fall Festival. Over the 3-day event, we reached 53 people. We also attended Green Lake State Park's Environmental Field Days, educating 255 children about the daunting pilgrimage of shorebird migration. During this time, Onondaga Audubon raised funds for piping plover conservation, totaling \$1,020. These funds will go directly into the program.



Transplanted American beach grass into a dune blowout. Photo: OPRHP



Last education event of the season with Onondaga Audubon Society (OAS). Photo: OAS

We concluded our educational programming for the year with Onondaga Audubon, hosting the classic Paint and Learn. It was a great way to end the season with 22 bird-loving people! The program is excited for the new year and hoping we have a more successful nesting season.

~Kennedy



## Central Region Update (Cont'd)

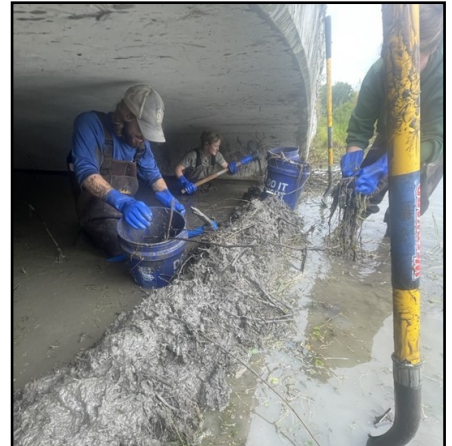
Mike Serviss, Stewardship Biologist, Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Project Coordinator, Delaney Kalsman, Stewardship Specialist, Cara Gannon, Assistant Environmental Educator

Salamander coverboard surveys aim to monitor long term forest health through using red-backed salamanders as a bioindicator. These studies are currently being conducted in stands infected with hemlock wooly adelgid. The program is run by FORCES Wildlife Stewards who measure for soil moisture, temperature, species diversity and abundance. During the 2024 fall season, six surveys were continued at Selkirk Shores State Park and expanded to Mexico Point State Park.



SCA member Hunter Parise with spoils from WISP dam removal. Photo: OPRHP

In September, there was a cooperative between Central and Thousand Island Region's staff, FORCES, and the SCA members in the Thousand Island Region. The taskforce worked to remove a beaver dam along a wildlife passage culvert in Wellesley Island State Park (WISP).



SCA and FORCES members remove dam along culvert in WISP. Photo: OPRHP

This was done so construction on the passage could be completed. The work occurred over two days (9/9 & 9/11) as the dam was deconstructed in layers to reduce downstream sedimentation. Currently, there is planning being done to mitigate future beaver dams.

Finally, FORCES Stewards and staff offered nuisance wildlife services to the Central Region that included consultations and help with groundhogs at Fort Ontario State Historic Site, and beaver dams along the Old Erie Canal.

~Delaney

The Environmental Education team out of Green Lakes State Park had a busy fall and end to 2024! We had a fantastic returning Steward, Kathryn Resanovich (see Steward Spotlight p. 13)! Kat is currently a Senior at SUNY ESF, majoring in Environmental Education & Interpretation. She has helped us host and maintain daily operations of the education center and assisting in programs. We have been so lucky to have her the past few semesters and are excited that she is joining us again for the spring.

We launched our High School Lake Study Field Trip. This hands-on field trip includes water quality testing, exploring unique lake life, and using special equipment to study Green Lake. With this successful new field trip, we have had our highest field trip attendance numbers ever, over 3,000 students!

In October, we hosted our annual Environmental Field Days and saw close to 800 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders from different schools. This event gives opportunities for classes to attend multiple sessions and learn about conservation, and recreation. Popular sessions included birds of prey, macro invertebrates, map & compass, and furs/skulls. We want to give a big thank you for all Parks staff, SCA, and FORCES Stewards who helped make this event happen.

In late fall, we welcomed Sam Schwartz. Sam is a Junior at SUNY ESF, studying Conservation Biology. He is using his Green Lakes Education Center experience for internship credit and will be joining us again for the spring semester. Sam has been vital in opening the center on the weekends and conducting "drop by" activities and crafts. "Drop by" activities are open for anyone to try that stops in the education center on the weekends. Sam's favorites include owl pellet dissection, mammal match, and track ID.

2024 was a great year for the Green Lakes Environmental Education Center. We had a record breaking field trip season, pre-Covid numbers for program attendance, and over 20,000 patrons visit the ed. center. We are excited to have two returning Stewards for the spring and are looking forward to 2025!

~Cara

## Partner Highlight: Muller Field Station

### An Introduction to the Muller Field Station: Opportunities for Collaborations in Conservation

Maura Sullivan, Director of Muller Field Station and Conservation Professor, Finger Lakes Community College



A fall paddle in the Honeoye Inlet. Photo: Sullivan

Connection, inquiry, stewardship, and accessibility encapsulate the heart of our work at Finger Lakes Community College's Muller Field Station. We are a 48-acre environmental education, research, and community outreach facility at the southern end of Honeoye Lake. Surrounded by natural areas including the Honeoye Inlet Wildlife Management Area, Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area, Cumming Nature Center, and various additional lands protected by The Nature Conservancy, Finger Lakes Land Trust, and local municipalities, we benefit from being embedded in an ecological landscape that is much more expansive than our property boundaries.

Our service population includes K-12 students, community members, and college students. We serve more than 20 regional school districts and homeschool groups, offering free educational programs on watershed science, biodiversity, outdoor recreation, and team building. Our channel paddles are one of our most popular programs. Launching from our boathouse into the Honeoye Inlet, each paddle guarantees a unique journey into one of the largest silver maple ash swamps in western New York State. Paddlers are met with an ever-changing array of floristic wonders, as well as a high probability of wildlife sightings (e.g., American beaver, common muskrat, great blue heron, green heron, wood duck, belted kingfisher, etc.). Each year we offer several guided paddles for the general public. Additional community offerings include weekly *Wander and Wonder* walks, a winter *Talk on the Wild Side* lecture series, a spring cooperative seed swap, a fall open house, and various wellness programs.



A few of the flowering plants to be seen at Muller Field Station throughout the year. From left to right: skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*), blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), and virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*). Photos: Sullivan

The goal of all these programs is to build community, foster connections with the natural world, promote stewardship of its resources, increase access to natural experiences, and cultivate curiosity in learners of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. It starts with getting people outside, in safe and welcoming spaces. We have been proud to partner with the Urban League of Rochester on summer programs at Muller Field Station and are actively cultivating relationships with other urban school and community groups. In 2022 we installed a handicap-accessible boat launch, and we are currently amid a major building project that includes the installation of a LULA elevator. This will enable mobility between the first and second floors of our Main Lodge and soon-to-be constructed 24-bed bunkhouse. We hope that the prospect of improved overnight accommodations opens more opportunities for people to come and settle in at Muller Field Station, making deeper and more meaningful connections with each other and the natural surroundings.

Our most extensive work in inquiry and stewardship occurs at the college level. Several FLCC conservation and horticulture classes meet regularly at the field station (e.g., Ecology Lab, Wildlife Field Techniques, Wildlife Management, Field Studies of Birds, Introduction to Horticulture, Wetlands Science and Practice, Wetland Mammals, Plant, etc.). In addition, regional colleges and universities also use the field station for class visits and research. Our natural resources and facilities provide an outdoor laboratory well-suited for applying classroom concepts and investigating ecological phenomena (Cont'd p. 9).



## Partner Highlight: Muller Field Station (Cont'd)

### An Introduction to the Muller Field Station: Opportunities for Collaborations in Conservation

Maura Sullivan, Director of Muller Field Station and Conservation Professor, Finger Lakes Community College

Some major projects carried out at the field station include walleye propagation, salamander conservation, river otter population dynamics, ash decline impacts, nest box monitoring, camera trap studies, and native plant propagation.



Top left: Intern James Raspanti checking Muller Field Station nest boxes, top right: FLCC Professor John Foust demonstrates walleye propagation methods, bottom: FLCC Professor John Bateman surveys for amphibian eggs in the Muller Field Station ponds. Photos: Sullivan

Our field studies internship program, which began in Fall 2020, with support from the Emil Muller Foundation, has presented another means for students to engage in meaningful, applied science. This paid internship program, named SWAMP for Science With A Mindful Purpose, emphasizes the importance of being present as observers and recorders to inform sustainable natural resource management decisions. Many of our interns work on the projects listed above at Muller Field Station but interns are also placed in positions to support science and stewardship efforts with external government and nonprofit organizations. For example, our interns have worked with the Finger Lakes Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM), NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association, Cumming Nature Center, and Ontario County Parks. In these positions, they have made significant contributions to increasing awareness, scientific knowledge, and control of a variety of invasive species (e.g., spongy moths, hemlock woolly adelgid, spotted lanternfly, European frog bit, Japanese stilt grass, etc.). Not only do the SWAMP applied experiences help propel students to the next steps in their career with greater skill sets and professional networks, these types of partnerships are critical for leveraging resources to effectively address the inundation of ecological threats facing our ecosystems (Cont'd. p 10).



Our SWAMP internship program logo.



## Partner Highlight: Muller Field Station (Cont'd)

### An Introduction to the Muller Field Station: Opportunities for Collaborations in Conservation

Maura Sullivan, Director of Muller Field Station and Conservation Professor, Finger Lakes Community College

The mission of Muller Field Station, and especially our SWAMP internship program, strongly aligns with that of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's FORCES program. In addition, we are neighbors. We lie immediately downslope from Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area. After an initial meeting with Parks and FORCES staff last winter, we have had a flurry of ideas for greater collaboration and have already implemented some shared events. In February, students in our Ecology Lab and Wildlife Management classes were trained by State Park staff and conducted northern harrier and short-eared owl surveys in grasslands at Harriet Hollister. Although we did not experience any sightings, it was quite an experience to be out at dusk intensely listening and watching. This past fall, Elijah Kruger, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Environmental Educator, was the special guest for one of our community Wander and Wonder Walks and wowed us with his ornithological knowledge and passion. We also enjoyed his guidance in dissecting some fox scat and identifying the bone fragments. Carlin Shew, FORCES Program Specialist, was the presenter for our October Talk on the Wild Side, sharing the wonders and wildlife of eastern hemlock forests, including some amazing camera trap videos. We are also in the initial stage of developing together an environmental education and stewardship summer program for high school students. We are tentatively calling it High schools Investigating Finger Lakes and Ontario Watersheds (Hi FLOW) ... because who doesn't love a good acronym!



Muller interns and volunteers with Amy Slentz, FL PRISM Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager post-European frog bit pull from the Honeoye Inlet. Photo: Sullivan



NYS State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and Muller Field Station collaborations, top left: initial meeting at Muller Field Station in December 2023, top middle: Carlin Shew guest speaker for Talk on the Wild Side October 2024, top right: Elijah Kruger special guest for Wander and Wonder Walk in November 2024, and bottom middle: grassland bird survey in February 2024. Photos: Sullivan

We at Muller Field Station are immensely grateful for the partnership with the FORCES program. Working together greatly enhances our capacity to promote and implement the science of conservation while empowering our students in their career trajectory. We look forward to our continued collaboration.



## Finger Lakes Region Update

Carlin Shew, FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region

This fall, a series of impactful stewardship and environmental education events took place across the Finger Lakes Region, fostering community engagement. Finger Lakes Community College's Muller Field Station in Honeoye, NY hosted FORCES for their "Talk on the Wild Side" event where we dove into the importance of eastern hemlock conservation in State Parks, addressing the ongoing threats from pests like the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) and their effects on local wildlife. Our inaugural Parks & Trails New York (PTNY) Fish & Wildlife Day took place September 28<sup>th</sup> at Taughannock Falls, where FORCES Program Specialist, Carlin Shew led a survey to monitor HWA and assess the health of hemlock populations along the Gorge Trail. At Taughannock Falls State Park, volunteers from the Master Gardener program came out and helped remove key invasive species from the waterfront. Lastly, a group of Cornell Tradition Fellowship students came to assist with a roadside trash cleanup at Buttermilk Falls State Park, contributing to park beautification in an area that deals with a high density of roadside trash. These projects and events contributed to an ongoing effort to engage the community in helping meet education and environmental stewardship goals of State Parks while also providing valuable educational and volunteer opportunities.



Fish and Wildlife Day at Taughannock Falls SP.  
Photo: OPRHP



Cornell Tradition Fellowship students assist with roadside trash clean up at Buttermilk Falls State Park. Photo: OPRHP

Ithaca College student and Conservation Steward Alicia Menduni made significant strides in various environmental stewardship efforts across the region. Alicia played a role in preparing control lines for the prescribed burn at Ganondagan State Historic Site and directly assisted with trail closures to ensure safety during the burn (pages 4-5). She provided support to our Biologists and Stewardship Project Coordinator, helping remove invasive pale swallowwort and multiflora rose in the restoration areas of Chimney Bluffs

State Park. Throughout her time this semester, Alicia collaborated with the Finger Lakes Horticulture Team, assisting with tree plantings and garden maintenance at Long Point State Park. She also supported our SCA NYS Parks Corps HWA Technician Steward, Torie Lakkis-Biggs, in completing grant-required hemlock monitoring at Robert H. Treman State Park, collecting data from a stand of 230 hemlocks in contribution to Finger Lake's United State Forest Service (USFS) annual hemlock grant reports. In addition, Alicia worked at Sampson State Park to support the Plant Materials Program (PMP), potting and preserving a rare grass species called *Bromus nottowayanus* which was removed in the path of the Black Diamond Trail extension near Buttermilk Falls (Cont'd. p. 12).



Conservation Steward Alicia Menduni prepping burn lines and manning trails at Ganondagan State Historic Site.  
Photo: OPRHP



## Finger Lakes Region Update (Cont'd)

Carlin Shew, FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region

In early November, Alicia and the FORCES team assisted in mulching the PMP restoration plants to insulate them for the winter season. Alicia's hard work this fall showcases a commitment to hands-on environmental stewardship, which is what the FORCES program is all about! Alicia presented her conservation work this semester, highlighting her wildlife camera trapping project, at our first ever multi-region FORCES and Stewardship Project Expo, held on December 2<sup>nd</sup> at Lorenzo State Historic Site.



Conservation Steward Alicia Menduni assisting Regional Stewardship and Horticulture Staff at Sampson and Long Point State Parks. Photo: OPRHP

Earlier this month the Environmental Education Team and FORCES Program Specialist, Carlin Shew, got the chance to attend the New York State Outdoor Education Association (NYSOEA) Annual Conference in Painted Post, NY. Carlin presented a FORCES program overview workshop, and was sworn onto the Board of Directors as NYSOEA's Central Region Representative; serving alongside Finger Lakes Educators Elijah Kruger (NYSOEA Western Region Rep.) and Josh Teeter (NYSOEA President Elect). Lots of great connections were made and we are looking forward to the partnerships and collaborations yet to come.

Reflecting on such a fruitful year, the FORCES team has been working hard to bridge the gap between Environmental Education (EE) and Environmental Stewardship (ES) in our region while supporting our student interns and volunteers in their career growth. Our passionate and hardworking team of staff and interns provided time and energy for our agency that made a difference for our parks and our patrons this year; and for that we are grateful!



FL Staff and SCA Parks Corps Members at the New York State Outdoor Education Conference Banquet (L-R: Finn Henderson, Elijah Kruger, Matt Adler, Meagan Terry, Abby Aitken, Torie Lakkis-Biggs, Spencer Grinsfelder, Josh Teeter, Carlin Shew, Amelia Kauffman). Photo: OPRHP



## Steward Spotlight: Kat Resanovich

Green Lakes State Park Education Center Program Assistant, Central Region



Kathryn (Kat) Resanovich is a senior at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry studying environmental education and interpretation with a minor in recreation, resource, and protected area management. She began working with FORCES in June 2024 as an Education Program Steward in the Central Region, based out of Green Lakes State Park. Since then, she has completed over 417 hours. She received funding through ESF's Office of Career Services through a Career Fellowship Award. Kat works on the education team to help create and lead educational programs and engage with visitors at the Green Lakes Environmental Education Center.

One of her main projects has been designing educational programs to help protect the freshwater reefs in the lake. Kat designed and led guided hikes and roving interpretation programs that taught visitors about the reefs and how to protect them. She has also helped create other new programs like a fall foliage hike and drop-by tabling activities about lake science and trees.

Kat grew up in Rockland County, NY near the Hudson River, which inspired her lifelong love of nature and science. When she was 5, she began volunteering as a part of the DEC's community science American eel monitoring program. She continued participating in this program for 10 years and it made her realize she wanted to go into the environmental field. When she was 15, she was accepted into an internship with the Bronx Zoo's education department. This helped her realize that more specifically, she wanted to go into the environmental education field to help connect people with nature and teach them about the natural world. Since then, she has worked in a variety of positions in the environmental education and interpretation field including with NYSOPRHP. At ESF, Kat is the president of the Student Environmental Education Coalition, a student club that connects students interested in the field and leads lessons throughout the Syracuse community. She looks forward to graduating this May and is hoping to continue living in Syracuse and find a full-time environmental education job.

### Send us your Selfies!

We are always looking for great pics for our FORCES photo album. We know you are out there working hard, having fun, and taking some amazing shots of our beautiful State Parks. Please share them with us. It is through your collective lens that we see all of us together as a FORCES family.



### Upcoming Events

4/2 First Saturday Hike  
Taughannock Falls State Park

4/6 FORCES Leadership Summit  
Green Lakes State Park

4/16 Fishstock  
Green Lakes State Park

4/22 Earth Day

4/26 Women In Nature Outdoor Skills  
Workshop, Camillus, NY

5/3 I Love My Park Day  
Participating State Parks

6/3-6/4 FORCES Trainapalooza  
Watkins Glen State Park



# The Force Behind FORCES Picture Page



L: Steward Alicia Menduni taking soil temperatures under a coverboard. R: Eastern red-backed salamander.



NA river otters caught on a camera trap in Buttermilk Falls State Park.

Photos: OPRHP



Stewards participating in benthic macroinvertebrate sampling during the 9th Annual FORCES Membership Gathering at Filmore Glen State Park.



FORCES and FL Env. Stewardship Staff assisting US Fish and Wildlife employees with an electrofishing survey at Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area.



Volunteers from Cornell Traditional Fellowship doing a trash pick up at Buttermilk Falls State Park.



Which hazel blossom.



Dan Hughes, FL Stewardship Project Technician, presents on emerald ash borer biocontrol at the 9th Annual FORCES Leadership Summit at Filmore Glen SP.



Great blue heron with fish. Photo: Maura Sullivan, Muller Field Station.



FL Stewards and Horticulture staff planting a tree at Long Point State Park.



SCA and FORCES members remove dam along culvert in Wellesley Island State Park.





**New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation**

New York State  
Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Central Region  
Lorenzo State Historic Site  
17 Rippleton Rd  
Cazenovia, NY 13035  
(315) 976-4092

FORCES Newsletter  
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### **FORCES Team**

**Amy Kochem**  
FORCES Program Coordinator

**Tom Hughes**  
Environmental Stewardship Biologist  
FORCES Program Manager  
Central Region

**Josh Teeter**  
Environmental Educator  
FORCES Program Manager  
Finger Lakes Region

**Carlin Shew**  
FORCES Program Specialist



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**The FORCES mission is to engage New York State college students to simultaneously improve OPRHP resources and enrich student academic, recreational, and career opportunities.**

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