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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.

Getting Back To Our Roots

Tom Hughes, NRS Biologist
Central Region FORCES Program Manager

As I read through this issue of our newsletter, I am reminded where our FORCES Program and its network grew from— in the words of former Environmental Management Bureau Director, Tom Lyons, “Parks are for people and environmental resources.” I believe it is the Parks and their natural resources that inspire our Stewardship...the root of it all. Our FORCES Family of Stewards, staff and many partners are the genuine and dedicated people that create the earthen fabric from which our Stewardship grows stronger and more impactful. We are so excited to announce our *FORCES Roots Alumni Network*— please see Page 11 for more info and to learn how to sign up. Special thanks to FORCES Program Specialist and NYS Parks Corps member Kelly Punch for all their fantastic efforts on this!



As we roll out our *FORCES Roots Alumni Network*, we are continuing a new feature in our newsletter— learn more about former FORCES Steward, Magen Rant’s journey in our ‘Alumni Spotlight’ (Page 7). Thanks for sharing your story with us Magen!

A beautiful thing about Stewardship is that it is never too early or too late to start your own journey. Some Stewards start contributing as high school students, and their contributions are significant! Check out our ‘Jr. Conservation Steward Spotlight’ and follow Nandika Rajaram’s journey as a Pollinator Steward (photo left and Page 2). You can also see her in action in her YouTube video—search for “Butterfly Garden—Girls Scouts Silver Award Project.” Way to grow Nandika! ;)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIFqNkcJdi4>

There are so many more people and projects to highlight from this issue. I invite you to explore our Regional Updates, Featured Project and Partner Highlight and, most importantly, enjoy the journey!



Junior Conservation Steward (Pollinator Steward), Nandika Rajaram, along with her parents, tour the grassland habitats at Green Lakes State Park in search of wildflowers, including this podding butterfly weed. Photo: OPRHP

Jr. Conservation Steward Spotlight: Nandika Rajaram

Pollinator Steward, Green Lakes State Park



Nandika planting seeds for sprouting.
Photo: OPRHP

I'm Nandika Rajaram, and I'm a freshman at Liverpool High School. I am a Girl Scout from Troop 10520, and I wanted to try my hand at earning the Silver Award. The Silver Award is basically the highest thing a Girl Scout at my level (Cadette) can earn. To earn the Silver Award, a Cadette needs to do something that creates a long lasting impact in the community and the world. Environmental science is of great interest to me, so I thought it would be good to do a project related to that. Environmental science, being a vast area, had a lot of options to offer. I wasn't sure how to choose the right one for me. I was in touch with Amy Samuels of Onondaga Environmental Institute, and Amy introduced me to Tom Hughes, NYS Parks Natural Resource Stewardship Biologist in the Central New York Region. He was more than willing to help me. The discussions with Tom helped me discover my topic. Tom suggested that we work with Green Lakes State Park, one of the largest state parks in Upstate New York. I came to the conclusion that setting up a butterfly garden at Green

Lakes would increase the number of pollinators in the park which will help the plants flourish. Being an amateur in the botanical field, it was impossible for me to do the work all by myself. At this juncture, Tom got me in touch with Mr. Peter Sterbak, Invasive Species/Bird Conservation Area Crew Leader. These two were the ones who helped me throughout the project, and my attempt wouldn't have been successful without their patience and guidance.

Pollinators are extremely crucial because they spread pollen, and help plants reproduce. Butterflies, bees, moths, and beetles are just to name a few pollinators who are the biggest reasons why many of our favorite fruits, vegetables, and flowers exist. Such gardens are designed to attract pollinators and increase their number using plants that they generally like. We planted many native species such as bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Joe-pye weed (*Eupatorium dubium*), milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), and butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). We chose a small triangular area where there will be many people to see the beautiful butterflies.

There were a few showstoppers on my way. For instance, I had to store a bag of seeds in the fridge to trick them into thinking that they were going through winter, so that they would know that the winter season is over and they can sprout when planted. I also raised some money through a bottle drive which would be put into use for similar causes. The plants are growing well and they will be moved to a greenhouse where they will stay over the winter. By next summer, there will be a full-fledged pollinator garden at Green Lakes, helping the ecosystem thrive.



Weeding a bee balm in a raised bed.
Photo: OPRHP

"This experience will greatly benefit future opportunities for myself in my education. Invasive species control is a big part of my Environmental Management major, so learning more about it this summer was definitely very important. I acquired many useful skills from this opportunity such as being able to better identify plant species and perform various surveying tasks, such as the Chittenango ovate amber snail surveys."

~ Jack McMullen, SUNY Cobleskill

Coordinator's Corner

Amy Kochem, FORCES Program Coordinator

The 2022 summer FORCES crew consisted of 37 Stewards and four Jr. Conservation Stewards. It was a very busy summer as Stewards completed projects ranging from landscape architecture to environmental education to trail maintenance to working in endangered species habitats.

Our 7th Annual Trainapalooza was held in early June at Watkins Glen State Park. Over 40 Stewards, SCA, and Park staff from across the state joined together for a two-day training. The days were filled with educational workshops including camera trapping, aquatic ecology, plant/tree/moss ID, and a scenic gorge hike.

Be sure to check our FORCES webpage for the *Who's Who* publication that will highlight all of our 2022 Stewards.

The Professional Career Opportunities (PCO) examination is being offered this fall. It is a test that state agencies can use to fill more than 150 different entry-level professional job types across a wide range of disciplines. The deadline to apply is November 30th. Go to the NYS Civil Service website for more information <https://www.cs.ny.gov/pco/>



Statewide FORCES Stewards, SCA, and staff at Trainapalooza at Watkins Glen State Park. Photo: OPRHP

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 Wakefield
Finger Lakes Office
2221 Taughannock Road
Trumansburg, NY 14886
(607) 387-7041

Alexandra Tillman
Niagara Region Office
3180 De Veaux Woods Dr E
Niagara Falls, NY 14305
(716) 299-0804

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Pittsford Sutherland High School
Scarsdale High School

Steward Spotlight: Gillian Smith

Wildlife Management Steward, Central Region



My name is Gillian Smith. I am a junior at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry and majoring in Conservation Biology. I first got involved with FORCES in the spring of 2022, after one of the previous ESF FORCES presidents connected me to Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist in the Central Region. This led me to join Alex's team as a Regional Wildlife Steward. This was an amazing opportunity where I was able to work on a variety of projects with different species. I worked on a few different deer management projects, surveying salamander populations, removing invasive species, and other nuisance animal projects. These projects provided me with critical fieldwork experience, and I also developed an even greater passion for working out in nature and understanding my surroundings. I had the opportunity to attend a variety of networking events with PARKS staff and NYSDEC staff, which helped me make many lasting connections.

Currently, I am partaking in an internship with the NYSDEC as their Land Management and Public Access Steward. With this position, I am helping to maintain the Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) throughout the region. So far, I have gotten the opportunity to partake in several projects with different biologists and technicians. These projects included updating kiosk information, attempting to band ducks (there were no ducks, unfortunately), and spreading native seed mix across an open field to encourage browsing for local wildlife. I am so grateful for all the opportunities I have gotten to help work on these projects and the ability to partake in hands-on conservation and management work. I am eager to see what is in store for the future and what interesting and fun projects I will work on next!

For more information about our 2022 FORCES Stewards, see the FORCES Who's Who publication coming soon to our webpage!

FORCES

Friends of Recreation, Conservation and Environmental Stewardship



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

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2022 FORCES STEWARDS: THE FORCE BEHIND FORCES



Delia Ablard
Pollinator Garden Steward

Delia majors in Environmental Studies at Ithaca College. She is from Ithaca, NY and has fun swimming, paddle boarding, water coloring, cooking, and surfing. She enjoys working with kids, whether at swim lessons or summer camp, and she loves to be outdoors! Delia's personal goals are learning to play the piano and to complete a triathlon. Professionally, she'd like to work with kids and to master plant identification.



Ana Maria Arroyo
Conservation Steward

While attending Ithaca College, Ana Maria majors in Environmental Studies. She grew up locally in Ithaca, NY and loves everything about wildlife! She enjoys wildlife tracking and taking long hikes with her dog, especially when they can discover new trails around Ithaca. When Ana Maria is not working in the woods, she de-stresses by painting, sewing or practicing guitar. She would like to pursue a career in wildlife conservation and environmental education and plans to continue her training in wildlife tracking. Julia would also like to learn more about using technology in wildlife studies and is especially interested in mustelids, particularly the fisher.

"This experience will benefit my future opportunities because it was my first dip into outdoor jobs and is a great addition to my resume. I learned people skills and became very well-versed on the science of the lakes."

~Maya Curle, University of Vermont

"I was pleasantly surprised by the diversity of projects that I was able to work on this summer and I learned so much about NY State Parks and about our ecosystems. My supervisors were always willing to teach me new plant species and answer any questions."

~Jack Murtagh, SUNY ESF

Finger Lakes Update

Carlin Wakefield, FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region



Left to right: Conservation Steward, Bethany Holland, SUNY Cortland Research Technicians, Kayelah Brown and Azaria Laster, Dr. Andrea Davalos, and FORCES Program Specialist Carlin Wakefield preparing to sample invasive earthworm populations at Buttermilk Falls State Park. Photo: OPRHP

It was a great summer in the Finger Lakes with Stewards spread around the region covering many different parks and contributing to important work throughout the 10 counties that make up our region. Conservation Steward and Ithaca College student, Bethany Holland, worked on a multitude of different projects including monitoring our newly re-vamped eastern red-backed salamander cover boards and Assessing the Vegetative Impact of Deer (AVID) in collaboration with Cornell University at Taughannock Falls State Park. Bethany also assisted research partner Dr. Andrea Davalos from SUNY Cortland and her research technicians with invasive species plots at Taughannock Falls, Buttermilk Falls, and Long Point State Park. This monitoring contributed to several research projects that Dr. Davalos has on Park land. In addition to these projects and more, Bethany worked a lot at the Taughannock Falls Overlook Pollinator Garden on garden maintenance and pollinator surveys. She is a passionate young entomologist, her expertise and enthusiasm for insects was shared with fellow stewards and staff, as well as patrons. Bethany finished out the summer with a bang by hosting a Wildlife Weekend: Insect Investigation Bioblitz event at Taughannock Falls pollinator garden. Families searched for species to document on iNaturalist and played a “Bug Bingo” scavenger hunt. Thanks to Bethany for her hard work and dedication contributing over 200 volunteer hours this summer!

Pollinator Garden Steward, Delia Ablard, also from Ithaca College, focused her efforts solely on the Taughannock Falls Overlook Pollinator Garden and was a huge help with early summer plantings, weeding, watering, other garden maintenance, education, and pollinator surveys. Her efforts directly assisted Horticulture Technician, Max McCune, and the Finger Lakes Landscape Restoration Program. Chimney Bluffs Trail Steward, Jack Bennink, worked under Trails Coordinator, Zac Ballard, and focused exclusively at Chimney Bluffs State Park working on trail maintenance, erosion control, and environmental outreach to patrons in order to help protect the delicate and ecologically significant bluff system.

In the Rochester area, Environmental Field Team Stewards, Steven Campbell and Anna Purtell worked on vegetation surveys and mapping including systematic invasive species surveys and surveys for native plant rarities in assistance to the Finger Lakes Environmental Field Team. Invasive Species Technician, Charlie Ippolito, and former Stewardship Project Coordinator, Kyle Webster led their work. Anna and Steven also assisted the New York State Plant Material Program based out of Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion State Historic Site. There they were led by former Greenhouse Technician, Colton Ratey, and focused on seeding, propagating, up-potting and caring for thousands of native species of forbs, grasses, and woody seedlings. The work they contributed at the Plant Materials Program this summer was integral to many statewide native species restoration projects including pitch pine plantings in the Palisades-Taconic Region and wetland species plantings for the state-threatened Blanding’s Turtle in the Thousand Islands Region.

Environmental Communications Steward, Nicholas Deya from SUNY Geneseo, assisted the Environmental Field Team and Stewards with all the above projects including vegetation surveys and Plant Materials Program assistance (continued on page 6).



Conservation and Pollinator Stewards, Bethany and Delia, posing in front of newly planted hibiscus at the Taughannock Falls Overlook Pollinator Garden. Photo: OPRHP

Finger Lakes Update (cont'd)

Carlin Wakefield, FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region

In addition to this work, Nick focused much of his internship hours on creating visual communication content like social media posts, informational signs, and articles for Finger Lakes Environmental Field Team and FORCES. Nick worked directly with our regional Graphic Designer, Amelia Kauffman, who assisted with guidance and edits for design layout. One of the signs that Nick worked on, which highlighted some of the beautiful statues at Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion State Historic Park, will be printed and displayed at the site. Thanks to Nick for creating a beautiful addition to the visual communication of our region.



Statewide FORCES Stewards, SCA, and staff pose in Fishkill Creek after the benthic macroinvertebrate survey event at Robert H. Treman State Park. Photo: OPRHP

Finger Lakes Stewards got to participate in a Central Region stewardship trip again this summer where we visited Clark Reservation and Chittenango Falls over two fun-filled days and an overnight campout at Green Lakes State Park. We assisted the American hart's-tongue fern and the Chittenango ovate amber snail projects, as well as participated in evening raptor surveys and late-night owl surveys with Central Region's Environmental Field Team members. This memorable trip brought together Stewards and staff from multiple regions and is always a great mid-summer reunion to network and have a blast. In addition, Finger Lakes FORCES hosted again this year our annual benthic macroinvertebrate sampling event at upper Robert H. Treman State Park in which Stewards from across the state visited to participate in the sample and learn about biomonitoring, stream health, and Finger Lakes geology.



Finger Lakes FORCES and SCA Stewards, SUNY Cortland Research Technicians, and Central Region Environmental Field Team members pose after surveying for American hart's-tongue ferns at Clark Reservation State Park. Photo: OPRHP

Finger Lakes FORCES had the pleasure of working closely with our SCA Parks Corps Environmental Education Team this summer. SCA Educators assisted hands on with leading FORCES Stewards, and co-facilitating events throughout the busy summer season. Thanks to Hannah Smith, Zach Young, and Nick Bachand for your dedicated work to the Finger Lakes FORCES Program. In an exciting update, we would like to congratulate Kyle Webster for accepting a position with the New York State Natural Heritage Program as our New State Parks Botanist. Finger Lakes Region will miss him, but we are so happy his dedication and expertise can now be shared statewide. Thank you to all our partners and staff who helped make the work this summer possible. We could not do it without you!

"I have been so pleased with this experience. As an aspiring wildlife biologist, I loved the chance to work on long-term surveys of deer pellet counts and salamander cover board placements. In addition, I was able to collect valuable data for my research on P. pennanti through surveys for river otter at Jennings Pond."

~Ana Maria Arroyo, Ithaca College

Alumni Spotlight: Magen Rant

Magen Rant, Ecologist, GEI Consultants, Inc.



I cannot believe it has been nearly two years since first starting as a FORCES Steward. My first day was one for the books. It was early February 2020 and I was driving to Robert H. Treman State Park to meet a bunch of people I don't know doing things I've never done before. It was about 7°F and I was ill equipped, to say the least. I met everyone at the base of the Red Pine Trail (a trail which I later decided is my least favorite) and listened to what we would be doing that day. I could not have heard correctly that we would be counting white fluffy bugs that have a hankering for eastern hemlock juice—the infamous hemlock woody adelgid. The amount of them seemed infinite. My eyeballs had a thin layer of ice crystals forming on the surface and I believed I had forgotten how to count. Someone is saying numbers out loud faster than I had ever heard anyone speak before while their note taker was hopping around in circles to stay warm. After we were done, I sat in my car and contemplated my life decisions. This was tough. Maybe I wasn't cut out for fieldwork. Maybe I made a huge mistake leaving my old career to chase a dream. Can I feel my toes yet?

My life has changed so much since then and I am honored to have the opportunity to share some of that with you. It's two years later and it was no mistake, I am cut out for field work, and I still have all ten toes. I finally graduated from SUNY Cortland with my bachelors degree in Biology at the ripe old age of 30. After my time with FORCES came to an end, I was offered a spot on the Stewardship Corps removing invasive plants from our three gorge parks, here in Ithaca. I connected with two wildly intelligent and dedicated women who remain an important part of my life. I had the ability to continue being involved with FORCES projects while focusing on protecting our native plants. I learned more about all the working pieces of NYS Parks and so much that goes on behind the scenes. Spending the summer outside, interacting with park patrons, refining my identification skills, and meeting crews from other regions made for an absolute blast of a field season.

It was so sad for summer to end, but I lucked out again and stayed employed with Parks through the fall and winter. I loved being a part of Parks through the off season and putting in the work to maintain these places we all love so much. During this time, I also accepted a position as an avian specialist conducting winter raptor surveys. I was finally working with birds! It was another seasonal position, but I enjoyed every minute of it. I got some experience working for a consulting company which was the bit of sparkle I needed to stand out enough for the next steps in my life.

My time with Parks played an integral role in helping me get my current job as a full time Ecologist with GEI Consultants Inc. I mainly perform wetland delineations throughout upstate New York, but am also involved in a number of restoration projects, environmental monitoring, and a long term ecological study on the levels of PCBs in fish tissue collected from the Hudson River. I collaborate with scientists from all over the US on projects I would have never thought I'd be a part of. I get to see so many different areas of the state that the public can't access, some of them are beautiful pieces of untouched land and others are not so beautiful. I've realized the potential of these "wasteland" farms and what I do can help struggling farmers have the opportunity to see their land being put to use again. We educate landowners on the importance of renewable resources and help them start the process of building solar. I know, I know, that can be a trigger word for some, but I truly believe in the benefits of some solar farms, not only for the environment as a whole but for the individual land owners who are housing these structures. Some have had hundreds of acres of land in their families for generations. A good portion of their agricultural fields are either barren or too much to handle. With the addition of solar panels, some farmers can actually retire with the passive income coming from solar companies renting their land.

My job involves identifying potential wetland resources on these properties and delineating the boundaries. We work closely with NYSDEC and USACE to ensure the least possible impact on our waters. As a wetland delineator I get to be a botanist, soil scientist, and hydrogeologist. Soil is actually really cool, trust me. I have a field partner I work well with who has a different skill set than I do so we are constantly learning from one another. Plus, being outside so much still lets me scratch my birding itch (continued on page 8).

Alumni Spotlight: Magen Rant (cont'd)

Magen Rant, Ecologist, GEI Consultants, Inc.

Consulting is probably not the end all be all for me, but the experience I'm getting now has been so valuable it transcends my ability to articulate. I am writing this from the back of my car nestled under a masterfully crafted blanket fort somewhere in rural Maine. I am thankful to be here right now. Through sunburn, bug bites, poison ivy, brambles and everything in between, I've found my place among those who have dedicated their lives to keeping the wilderness wild.

Here are my words of wisdom, as cliché as they may be: You're not too old to start a new career. Do the internship. Be prepared for all of the goodies that come with field work. Experience in your field is NEVER a waste of time. Ecology and conservation is so much more than a career for many of us, it's our lifestyle and I am so incredibly grateful for NYS Parks and FORCES for helping me get to a place I know I'm meant to be.

Featured Project: Fort Gray & Battle of Queenston Heights Interpretive Panel

Spencer Wybieracki, Niagara Conservation Steward

Over the course of our internships this past summer, myself along with fellow Niagara Conservation Stewards Emily Miller, Brandon Tomasik, and Max Franklin were assigned a special task known as the "Fort Gray" project. This project was unlike any other in years past for the FORCES Stewards to complete due to its unique subject matter. Near the Regional Office at DeVeaux Woods State Park nestled in the trees between Devil's Hole and Artpark State Parks, a new overlook was to be placed along the Niagara Scenic Parkway bike trail in Lewiston, NY. After a typical meeting with the Niagara Commission where the project was noted, it was discovered that the new overlook location along the Niagara Gorge is believed to be the same site of Historic Fort Gray, a significant battle site from the War of 1812. This connection was discovered by one of our Niagara Commissioners, Tom Chambers, Dean of Arts & Sciences and a Professor of History at Canisius College. Fort Gray was part of the greater Old Fort Niagara and was the host of the Battle of Queenston Heights before it was destroyed years later by the British.



Interpretive panel installed at the overlook.
Photo: OPRHP

Emily, Max, Brandon, and I were enlisted to work with Professor Chambers to further research Fort Gray and the War of 1812, with the goal of creating a history-focused interpretive panel for the overlook. He arranged for us to visit the Niagara County Historical Society and the Buffalo History Museum archives to conduct our work. Thanks to connections with current staff at these facilities, we had the privilege to view selected novels, historic journals, newspaper articles, and textbooks that would normally take months to locate. Due to copyright laws and to maintain the historic integrity of some of these documents, we took non-flash photos and took notes in pencil of all the information we could find on Fort Gray, the battle that took place, and any other relevant facts we found.

After about two days of research and a couple more days of planning and visiting sites of similar historic signage in the area, we began to construct our panel. Using the information we gathered, we then created a template for the sign. After all the research we did, it was challenging to summarize every fact and story we discovered about this site into one panel. However, we decided to prioritize the most notable landmarks of Fort Gray and some background information about the War of 1812. In addition to conducting the research and providing the information, we were given the creative freedom to choose the design, layout and all photos used on the panel.

On our last day of the project, we were able to finally meet with Professor Chambers in person and review any changes needed of our draft. After tweaking a couple things, it was then sent to be published. Our historic panel is now constructed and at the overlook, to be seen by everyone who stops to visit the outlook post along the bike trail. This was an amazing opportunity for us as Stewards to be part of, as it was a very unique project, and our work will be showcased to patrons for years to come.

Partner Highlight: Alison Kocek

Postdoctoral Researcher, SUNY ESF; Vice President, Onondaga Audubon

Their multitude of colors and beautiful songs make birds captivating and inspiring animals, whose highly conspicuous nature allows nearly anyone to enjoy them. However, their importance on the landscape goes far beyond that of human enjoyment. Birds provide essential ecosystem services including pollination, seed dispersal, and insect control. They also serve as environmental-indicators and their decline can indicate larger causes for concern within the ecosystems they inhabit. Monitoring of both imperiled and common bird species can lead to early detection of population changes and allow land managers to engage in conservation action to protect birds and their habitats before losses become too great.

One way to study bird populations is through the MAPS Program (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship). This program is a continent-wide collaborative effort run by the Institute for Bird Populations to monitor the avian vital rates of survival, productivity and recruitment across North America through banding and point count methods. Seeking to fill a gap in the Central New York area, I worked with a fellow ornithologist, Michelle Stantial, to set up a MAPS bird banding station at Baltimore Woods Nature Center in 2017. This station is a collaboration between Baltimore Woods, SUNY-ESF and Onondaga Audubon and we have just completed our 6th year of operation. Operation of this station involves setting up mist nets at the same 10 locations at the site approximately weekly throughout the core avian breeding season of late May to early August. These nets are very thin and nearly invisible (even to people) and birds that are active in the area will plunk into these nets and get stuck. Myself and other highly trained ornithologists check the nets every 20-30 minutes to untangle and remove birds and bring them back to the banding station.



Identifying and aging a blue-winged warbler by its molt patterns. Photo: Alison Kocek



Alison Kocek examining a female hooded warbler to determine if it is in breeding condition by blowing on the chest, looking for a brood patch (featherless skin on the chest that allows birds to properly incubate their eggs). Photo: OPRHP

All captured birds are then identified to species, given an individual numeric band (or if already banded, the band number is recorded), and additional important life history and morphometric data is collected. We seek to determine the age of the bird; the sex of the bird; whether the bird is likely to be actively breeding; and we collect measurements to determine the health of the bird such as weight, fat, and the length of the wing. These factors combined give us insight into what bird species are breeding at Baltimore Woods, which are successfully producing young, which are returning to breed year after year, and what changes in species occurrence and abundance are happening over time. Since we cannot catch every bird of every species that is present around the station, we also collect basic count data of all birds seen and heard at the station during our banding effort to better understand the true species composition at the site.

Aspiring ornithologists often join us for our banding efforts, including: New York State Parks and FORCES Stewards; SUNY ESF and SUNY Oswego students; and interested volunteers from Onondaga Audubon, Baltimore Woods, and beyond. These individuals aid with daily set-up/take-down of nets, checking for bird presence in nets, recording data, and even banding birds. They provide a vital service to the station in ensuring that all birds are safely and quickly removed from nets, processed, and returned to their daily lives.

(continued on page 10).

Partner Highlight: Alison Kocek (cont'd)

Postdoctoral Researcher, SUNY ESF; Vice President, Onondaga Audubon

In return, these young biologists are trained on proper bird handling and processing and data recording that will help them with their promising future careers. Members of the public also often join us to observe how our banding operation works. This is invaluable outreach as getting to see a bird up close, even if it's a more common species, can often serve to spark a new connection with nature that can bring about environmental awareness and a deeper interest in birds and birding.

At the end of each season, I summarize the data we collected for our collaborators and share our results with the public. This year we captured 157 individuals of 24 species. We most commonly caught gray catbirds, song sparrows, and common yellowthroats but we also caught some less common species including: a blue-winged warbler, swamp sparrow, indigo bunting, and a scarlet tanager. Of the birds captured, 41 were individuals that had been banded in a previous field season, including one gray catbird that was banded in 2018 and has returned to breed at Baltimore Woods every year since. Stories like these show the amazing abilities of birds to not only survive their thousands of mile bi-annual migration but to also be able to return to the exact same location each summer to raise their young.

In addition to being of use for local managers at Baltimore Woods, this data is also sent to the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP) to be used in combination with the 1200 other MAPS stations set up across the North American continent. This wide distribution of data allows IBP to look at range-wide shifts in avian presence, survival, and productivity. I also share our breeding bird findings with the New York Breeding Bird Atlas III in the form of daily eBird checklists. This data will be used as part of a 5-year study that is seeking to determine the species distribution of breeding birds across New York State.

It is exciting that information collected at one small site can have such a wide-spread impact on avian conservation, and I am so grateful to have the help of so many interested individuals to keep this station running year after year.



Banders use color variation in feathers to help age birds. Here we can see the contrast between the gray adult formative feathers and browner juvenile feathers of a gray catbird that let us know that this bird hatched last year and is returning to breed for the first time. Photo: Alison Kocek

“Thanks to the knowledge and experience I’ve gained with the help of the Stewardship Staff, I feel much better equipped for a future in environmental conservation. Although surveys could be tedious at times, I always left feeling satisfied with my small contributions to the preservation of local native biodiversity. My ultimate goal is to work in invasive species management and this experience proved highly informative and conducive to that goal. I can certainly say that I have a much greater understanding of what this job entails and what to expect from a career in the conservation field.”

~Luke Thompson, Jamestown Community College

New Staff Highlight: Kelly Punch

NYS Parks Corps, Student Conservation Association, FORCES Program Specialist

This past year, I've worked alongside Amy, Tom, and the rest of the excellent FORCES crew as a Student Conservation Association NYS Parks Corps member. As the SCA FORCES Program Specialist, I primarily create content for the FORCES social media pages, assist with environmental education events, and work in the field with the Central Region's Environmental Field Team. I've also been able to contribute some of my graphics and art to several FORCES events or promotional content, which is a treat as someone who draws a lot in their spare time! I'm especially proud to have helped create the *FORCES Roots Alumni Network* on LinkedIn, which will serve as a hub for past, present, and future FORCES Stewards to communicate and share professional development opportunities. The desire to have a home for FORCES Family to connect strongly resonated with me as someone who cherishes community and sharing resources between folks with similar goals. Before working with FORCES, I attended Hobart and William Smith Colleges and graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor's in Environmental Studies and a minor in LGBT Studies. This is currently my second term with the Student Conservation Association in New York State; I originally set off to join the 2020 Excelsior Conservation Corps crew, but as COVID-19 took hold in New York our term was cut short, and we were sent home. Fortunately, I had the chance to join the 2021 Excelsior Conservation Corps, doing a mix of trail work and invasive species management in state parks across the Finger Lakes Region with my wonderful crew. When I'm not working, I enjoy drawing and spending time with my family and friends—especially in state parks! Searching for mushrooms to snap pictures of and research is one of my favorite park activities. I also enjoy snowshoeing (which I did for the first time this year!), and hope to do more of it as the snow begins to fall in my beautiful home state of New York.



FORCES Roots Alumni Network: Kelly Punch



As a team, we are excited to announce the creation of the *FORCES Roots Alumni Network*! The FORCES Roots Network mission is multifold: preserve the legacy and connections of FORCES Alumni; connect past, present, and future FORCES Stewards; and provide professional development opportunities for those who share a passion for our New York State Parks—and the environment as a whole.

This LinkedIn group was created with the FORCES Family in mind. When we think of roots, we think of where we want to call home or the things that keep us stable. Our roots as an organization are our invaluable Stewards, supporters, and teams! Every hour of work gone into introducing others to environmental stewardship and action is just one piece of a puzzle that forms the beautiful, picturesque New York State Parks being cared for and loved by all. And the Stewards that go on to work in other agencies out of state (or out of the country!) carry their love and passion for environmental stewardship with them everywhere they go. Current and prospective Stewards recognize this passion, and when they can see themselves also working in New York and sharing their own passion for environmental stewardship, FORCES grows stronger.

We want the Roots Network to amplify the passions of our Stewards, share FORCES Family stories, and help each other grow personally and professionally in the field we care so much about. If you are interested, we encourage you to join the FORCES Roots Alumni Network group on LinkedIn and connect with fellow Stewards there. Share job opportunities, highlights from your current positions, and relevant events amongst good friends. Finally, thank you for finding a family in FORCES and laying down Roots with us!

Central Region Update

Cara Gannon, Environmental Educator Assistant; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Jordyn Dala, Piping Plover Project Crew Leader

Green Lakes State Park Environmental Education Center has had quite a busy summer! From being the welcoming face of our education center to weekly programs throughout the park, we could not have made it through the summer without the help of our five Environmental Education Center Host Stewards! They helped us maintain our education center and programming. Collectively, our Stewards and environmental educators interacted with and had close to 12,000 park patrons visit our education center from Memorial Day through Labor Day. All Stewards took different shifts hosting our education center and we were able to keep it open every day of the week. Our Stewards Megan Cammett, Silas Cochran, Julia Baumann, Maya Curle, and Rebecca Geneus were a friendly face to the center and helped many park visitors with questions about our beautiful lakes and park. Julia oversaw our Saturday morning craft cart in the campgrounds. Kids were able to stop by the playground areas and pick up pre-made bags with an assortment of nature crafts. Maya, was our first ever FORCES Steward from the University of Vermont. Julia and Maya took on the busiest days in the center with being our hosts on Saturdays and Sundays. Megan and Silas were a huge help and in charge of our weekend programs and night events. We hosted movie nights at the Reserve Shelter Baseball Field featuring “The Bad Guys”, “Despicable Me”, and “Sonic the Hedgehog 2”. The popular night programs that took place within our campgrounds were campfire and s’mores and nocturnal animal programs. We encountered bats, caught dragonflies, and attracted moths with bait all throughout summer! A park patron and Steward favorite were our tie-dyeing events. Megan and Silas also assisted our Central Region Environmental Educators, Katie Mulverhill and Cara Gannon, on field trips and other programs when they needed extra hands -on deck. Some of our other popular programs included owl pellet dissection, kayak lessons, guided hikes around the lake, and making track molds.

Now that school is back in session, we are starting to transition into our field trip season here at the Education Center. Our educators have also welcomed on a few new Environmental Education Center Host Stewards for the fall. We are excited to announce that in October we will be hosting our first Environmental Field Days since the pandemic! 5th and 6th graders throughout the surrounding area will visit Green Lakes and go to various stations learning about the park and different environmental topics.

~Cara



A lab reared snail that had been released into the habitat and recaptured during COAS population surveys.
Photo: OPRHP

The summer season at Chittenango Falls State Park saw the return of population surveys for the Chittenango ovate amber snail. With the help of SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, six population surveys were held from June through August. This is the first time in two years that all six surveys have been completed. While a population has not been computed, we are optimistic about COAS populations due to finding multiple recaptures over the course of the surveys. During the final survey, the NY Times joined us to do a piece on the conservation efforts being made to help the snails.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/13/science/chittenango-snails-conservation.html>

FORCES Stewards, referred to as the ‘snailer crew’, focused on pale swallow-wort and European dewberry management. Overall, the snailer crew removed 3,138 pale swallow-wort stems, 225 gallons of pod clippings, and 1,068 gallons of European dewberry clippings. The work done has been significant in reducing pod and drupe production, and overall cover of invasive species in Chittenango Falls State Park. A sign the summer season is coming to an end is when SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry visits for the annual Saturday of Service. This year, the COAS Project hosted 30 college freshmen for a guided hike and litter removal. Together, we removed 10 gallons of litter from various trails in the park.

~Delaney

Central Region Update (cont'd)

Cara Gannon, Environmental Educator Assistant; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Jordyn Dala, Piping Plover Project Crew Leader

Deer Management Techniques Expo

In August, Central EFT hosted a Deer Management Techniques Expo at Green Lakes State Park (GLSP) to explore deer management techniques that can be applied in state parks. The event's activities included an Estimating Deer Density presentation by Dr. Brian Underwood, Research Wildlife Biologist with USGS, a Harvest Data Collection workshop held by Courtney LaMere, Wildlife Biologist with NYS DEC R7, and a guided hike showcasing deer monitoring efforts at GLSP led by Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist with central NYS Parks. It was a great opportunity for folks to learn and ask questions from our guest wildlife experts. Over 30 attendees across several regions joined us for the event and it went without a hitch! We were extremely appreciative of our guest speakers and all who participated in the event.



Park staff listening in to Courtney LaMere's presentation. Photo: OPRHP



Kanika installing bluebird nest boxes at Battle Island Golf Course. Photo: OPRHP

Bluebird Nest Box Installations @ Battle Island State Park

Central EFT staff (A. Brown, K. Jakhmola) installed 14 bluebird nest boxes on the Battle Island State Park Golf Course in early September. The golf course's landscape with its mowed fairways and scattered trees provides suitable habitat for the eastern bluebird. Boxes were placed back-to-back to decrease competition with other bird species. Pairing boxes allows birds of different species to coexist within the same habitat. The hope of these nest box installations is to aid in increasing bluebird populations in the Great Lakes region. Similar to the bluebird nest box surveys that are conducted in our other parks, these nest boxes will be surveyed from February - September. Data collected will include bluebird arrival date, presence or absence of nest, species, and nest productivity.

Grassland & Old Growth Surveys @ Green Lakes State Park

The Central EFT Staff and Stewards conducted both grassland and old growth forest bird surveys within Green Lakes State Park. Each survey has ~16 predetermined points within each habitat that is surveyed. Surveys were conducted starting 30 minutes before sunrise; at each point surveyors listen and watch for 10 minutes and record all bird species/individuals that are seen and heard. Surveys are conducted early in the morning between the months of April-August (during breeding season) because this is when songbirds are most active singing their songs. Central EFT staff did their best to alternate between grassland and old growth forest surveys on a bi-weekly basis. Birds act as pollinators, seed dispersers, and nature's very best pest control. For these reasons it is important to understand what bird species call our parks home and their estimated population size (continued on page 14).



Grace Sinsebox and Steph Minarik collecting and recording data during a grassland bird survey. Photo: OPRHP

Central Region Update cont'd

Cara Gannon, Environmental Educator Assistant; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Jordyn Dala, Piping Plover Project Crew Leader

The data collected during these surveys can help us in our managing efforts within the park to better support the species found and promote new species presence. Some interesting activity from grassland species seen were eastern meadowlark and bobolink pairs chasing each other, and some uncommon species heard in the old growth forest were a rose-breasted grosbeak and a magnolia warbler. These surveys also provide a great opportunity for folks to become more familiar with ID'ing songbirds. We had EFT staff from all different projects come out and help us on these as well as folks from other regions. Thank you to all that participated!



EFT Staff and Stewards listening and searching for owls during an evening owl survey. Photo: OPRHP

Evening Raptor and Owl Surveys @ Green Lakes State Park Callback evening bird surveys were conducted by Central EFT staff and Stewards to target raptor and owl species in Green Lakes State Park. Callback surveys consist of playing a series of different species calls on a speaker and listening for any to callback as a sign of their presence. Evening raptor surveys were conducted between 6-8pm. EFT staff were stationed across several predetermined points that border our Bird Conservation Area in GLSP. At each survey point a series of calls were played. Each species call was played for 2 minutes, and then staff would listen for another 2 minutes for any response. Any raptors seen or heard during the survey were recorded. Species targeted during these surveys were northern goshawk, cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, northern harrier, red-shouldered hawk, broad-winged hawk, and red-tailed hawk. These surveys did not yield much data which could be due to the weather, climate, timing, and the ability for the raptors to hear our calls. We will be using the data collected to reevaluate and modify our survey protocols.

Callback methods were also used to target owls within the old growth forest at GLSP. Owl surveys were conducted after sunset on a biweekly schedule. The owl survey consisted of surveying 3 set points within the old growth forest. Similar to the raptor surveys, a series of calls were played on a speaker at each survey point but for the owl surveys we increased our call and listening time. For each species we played their call for 2 minutes, then used our spotlights to search and listen for 2 minutes, we did this twice for each species. The species targeted in this survey were the eastern screech owl, barred owl, and great horned owl. Our surveys yielded great success having heard/saw barred owls (both juveniles and adults) during each of our surveys and heard a great horned owl in the far distance during one of our surveys. We were excited to be able to have other regions join us in these surveys as well!

~Alex



An adult barred owl that flew in to check out our calls during an evening owl survey. Photo: OPRHP



Attention FORCES Alumni

Please join the **FORCES Roots Alumni Network** group on LinkedIn and connect with fellow Stewards!!!



What is your legacy? We want to hear your stories and learn what you are now up to. Please send us an update!

Central Region Update cont'd

Cara Gannon, Environmental Educator Assistant; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Jordyn Dala, Piping Plover Project Crew Leader



John Wiley (USFWS) looks into the Morgue Pit at Fern Cave National Wildlife Refuge. Photo: OPRHP

While there is much to talk about on the American hart's-tongue fern (AHTF) conservation project, I want to focus this update on a particular and very special event that happened this summer.

John Wiley, our administrator for the AHTF project at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), reached out to me over three years ago with a great idea- to propagate AHTF at Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion State Historic Park and transplant them in the state of Alabama. At the time there was only one remaining AHTF population in the state and another had been extirpated within the last decade or so. It so happens that the population that was extirpated was located within a USFWS property known as Fern Cave National Wildlife Refuge-the perfect place to reintroduce AHTF! Better yet, we already had dozens of the threatened ferns available. These ferns were grown at SUNY ESF from spores collected at the last remaining Alabama

population and came courtesy of Dr. Danny Fernando-a professor at the university. We housed them at Sonnenberg Gardens with the OPRHP Plant Materials Program. Plans were made and a date was set to travel to Alabama to plant the ferns in April of 2020. Of course, that trip was promptly cancelled in light of lockdown restrictions during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fast forward to April of 2022 when we started planning the Alabama trip once again. The ferns were three years older, and we now had about 100 plants of Alabama origin at Sonnenberg. After much coordination with our partners down south, a date was set for the week of June 13th, 2022. John, myself, and 91 American hart's-tongue ferns packed into a rental van and made the more than 17 hour journey from Syracuse to Huntsville in a single day. A very long day indeed. Especially for John- who drove the entire way due to insurance purposes.

We got to work transplanting the ferns the very next morning. After spending the night in the van in the Hilton Garden Inn parking lot, the ferns were then transported to the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in Decatur, AL, where at least a dozen of the kindest USFWS staff and interns helped us to bare-root them in preparation for planting. Into plastic grocery bags the ferns went- now with naked roots. We drove for about an hour in 4x4 pickups up many steep and winding gravel roads to the Fern Cave National Wildlife Refuge, stopping to unlock numerous security gates along the way. There, we hiked into the site and came across a lost beagle (who was a good boy, and the owners were eventually found) and our climbing guide who would assist our entry into the



Freshly transplanted AHTF in the Morgue Pit. Photo: OPRHP

planting area- a ~70-foot-deep sink hole with two entrances to extensive cave systems known as Morgue Pit. I asked why it was called Morgue Pit before we entered and was told that the pit was filled with many animal skeletons and carcasses when some settlers in the area first discovered it- yikes! It was time for us to bring some life back to the Morgue Pit (continued on page 16).

Central Region Update (cont'd)

Cara Gannon, Environmental Educator Assistant; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Jordyn Dala, Piping Plover Project Crew Leader

The descent into the pit is steep but not quite a vertical drop. However, we used ropes and harnesses to ensure everyone's absolute safety. The bags with the ferns were lowered down on a rope once we were in the pit and, after carefully considering the site for a while, we began to re-populate this former AHTF haunt! In all, 49 ferns were planted that afternoon- effectively more than doubling the population of the species in Alabama from 33 to 82 plants. That being said, the true success of the event can only be determined over the coming years as USFWS staff return to the pit annually to assess survival, growth, and reproduction. Good luck ferns!

John and I buckled into the van once more the following day and transported the remaining 42 ferns across the border to Tennessee. There, we met with a botanist from the Tennessee Natural Heritage Program, a TN State Park Ranger, and a climber. We all drove and then hiked along a rocky, dry river bed into the last known AHTF population in Tennessee- a place I visited as a graduate student researching the fern more than six years prior. In 2016, we found about twelve small AHTF remaining in the Poplar Pit. In 2022, that number had dwindled to just three plants- all with leaves no larger than two or three inches in length. With permission, one of the three plants was taken by the botanist (Caitlin) to grow out and attempt to salvage the genetic lineage of Tennessee's American hart's-tongue ferns. Caitlin also took the 42 potted AHTF of Alabama origin to be cared for and further propagated by a botany professor and his students at Sewanee University. Those plants, after their long journey south, may prove useful in future efforts to research and reintroduce the American hart's-tongue fern in the southeastern United States.



The hike to the AHTF population at Poplar Pit in Tennessee.
Photo: OPRHP

I feel very grateful and humbled to have been a part of such a wonderful and well-executed conservation effort on behalf of a species that is struggling to survive, particularly in Alabama and Tennessee. Many thanks are owed and will continue to be owed to the USFWS staff at both the New York Field Office and the Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge- particularly John Wiley and Drew Wirwa, Caitlin Elam of the TN Natural Heritage Program, Jon Evans and Nneka Okolo of Sewanee University, and Jason Reynolds of TN State Parks. The success of this project is also thanks to Danny Fernando of SUNY ESF, Tom Hughes of FORCES/OPRHP, Brigitte Wierzbicki of the OPRHP Plant Materials Program, the Central Region and business offices of OPRHP, and all of the numerous researchers, staff, FORCES Stewards, and volunteers who have helped with the AHTF conservation project over the years. Thank You!

~Mike

This past summer, the Great Lakes Piping Plover (PIPL) Crew was on the beach monitoring for plovers everyday (weather permitting). The crew assisted at DEC's Lake View Wildlife Management Area where, for the first time in many years, a pair of PIPL successfully nested. They were both offspring from Sandy Island Beach (SIB) State Park nests 2021 and 2020. This was a record high of three nesting plover pairs between SIB and Lake View. At SIB, our two nesting pairs, Ajax and Arlene & Aragorn and Arwen, hatched five eggs with four chicks fledged.

We also assisted Katie Hietala-Henschell (DEC) to conduct a hairy-necked tiger beetle survey at SIB. This consisted of walking the entirety of SIB in a row and counting and beetles seen and also caught within a given plot (continued on page 17).



Katie Hietala-Henschell showing the difference between sub-species and true hairy-necked tiger beetles.
Photo: OPRHP

Central Region Update (cont'd)

Cara Gannon, Environmental Educator Assistant; Delaney Kalsman, COAS Project Coordinator; Alex Brown, Stewardship Specialist; Mike Serviss, Regional Conservation Project Coordinator; Jordyn Dala, Piping Plover Project Crew Leader



PIPL Technician Grace Sinsebox and Regional Technician Gina Sciarra transplanting Dune Grass
Photo: OPRHP

Beetles were then examined to determine if they were indeed hairy-necked or a sub-species. These data are also taken into account for dredging purposes. We assisted Dr. Alison Kocek (Onondaga Audubon Society) and Lake View Wildlife Management Area staff in the catching and banding of PIPL chicks and at SIB. We also transplanted almost 400 dune grass plants. While monitoring the beach, we noted species abundance and diversity at SIB using eBird. Some notable birds seen this season aside from the GL PIPL were a marbled godwit – a rarer species seen at SIB during migration (it has only ever been documented as seen in the county 4 times), and a bald eagle. Additionally, the PIPL crew did educational outreach on the beach at SIB. Also the crew had classrooms come to SIB and traveled to Sandy Creek for a presentation.

The GL PIPL crew assisted the EFT (Environmental Field Team) with a variety of projects throughout the Central Region. We checked bluebird boxes within Green Lakes State Park's Bird Conservation Area (BCA) to increase the population by placing east facing nest boxes at ~6 feet in height in varying locations. Grassland bird surveys were typically held in conjunction with BCA nestbox checks. Species abundance and diversity were recorded during these

surveys. The PIPL crew assisted in monitoring for raptor species abundance and diversity. We participated in owl surveys, typically following the Raptor Surveys. These owl surveys measured and recorded species abundance and diversity of any owls within Green Lakes State Park.

The PIPL Crew had the opportunity to help Dr. Alison Kocek with Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) surveys throughout the summer at Baltimore Woods in Marcellus, NY. During these surveys, ten mist nets were set up and checked about every thirty minutes, depending on the weather. Data was collected for new and recaptured individuals. New individuals were banded with a USFWS band, while recaptured birds had their band number noted. Birds were aged usually based on plumage. The sex of the bird, along with breeding status, feather wear, molting, and amount of fat were recorded. While at Baltimore Woods with supervision, staff had the chance to extract birds from nets, handle them, and take measurements as well as record data. A few of the common species captured include gray catbird, common yellowthroat, song sparrow and yellow warbler.



Raptor surveys at Green Lakes State Park
Photo: OPRHP

The PIPL team worked at the New York State Fair. Patrons were educated about eastern bluebirds and guided while they made nesting boxes for them. Boxes were made from pre-cut pine wood walls for the box. During assembly, the team educated patrons on why the boxes are helpful and handed out pamphlets to inform them of the best spaces to install them. Some of the PIPL team assisted Alex Brown in banding geese and finding goose nests in multiple locations and additionally oiled the eggs in an effort to control the populations. At Selkirk Shores State Park, the PIPL team made an effort to remove all Japanese stilt grass within the park. Furthermore, at Green Lakes State Park, buckthorn, pale swallow-wort, multiflora rose, honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, Asiatic bittersweet, and garlic mustard were removed.

~Jordyn

"This internship provided me with the opportunity to learn more about COAS. From this experience I was hoping to gain knowledge of invasive species, and have a comfortable first fieldwork experience, both of which were accomplished."

~Layla Blask, SUNY ESF

Niagara Region Update

Allie Tillman, FORCES Program Specialist, Niagara Region



Conservation Stewards Emily & Spencer birding with Environmental Staffers Megan & Nick at Knox Farm State Park. Photo: OPRHP

As always, the Niagara Region's FORCES Stewards were hard at work all summer long! With a smaller group this growing season, we were able to focus on certain topics of interest and create a more personalized experience for each of our Stewards. We hosted seven Stewards total this summer, all hailing from different universities, majors, and backgrounds.

Our Trail Management Steward, Max Franklin, is a recent graduate of the University of Buffalo and was seeking an internship to gain experience in the field, and boy did he! On Mondays, Max worked alongside the Niagara Gorge Maintenance Crew. He was held to the same standards as any other crew member, implementing proper trail management strategies, the safe-use of equipment, how to evaluate the integrity of trail structures and surfaces, and often responding to rockslides and fall outs along the gorge. Max also worked with our Conservation Stewards one day a week.

Our Water Quality Steward, Chloe Diebold, attends Niagara University and spent almost every morning of her summer collecting water samples at Woodlawn Beach State Park. Each day she took samples from Lake Erie and Rush Creek, completed field sheets regarding turbidity, environmental factors, recent weather events etc., submitted the data into our online system, AND delivered the samples to the testing lab all by 9:00am! Emily Miller, one of our Conservation Stewards, volunteered to assist Chloe on Mondays when the workload is doubled for additional data collection. The extra set of hands was a huge help and made the extra sampling even possible. A big thank you goes out to these two Stewards, as the work they did was essential in keeping our beaches open for patron use and maintaining public health safety and standards.

Emily Miller (SUNY Cortland), Brandon Tomasik (University at Buffalo), and Spencer Wybieracki (Niagara University) were our main Conservation Stewards this summer. Max Franklin also worked with this group each week. They worked on numerous projects throughout the region and some to highlight are invasive crayfish surveys at Amherst State Park, emerald ash borer biocontrol releases throughout the region, assisting statewide staff with tiger beetle surveys at Letchworth State Park, invasive species removals, creating an interpretive panel, and more!

Our Stewards attended a couple unique events this summer along with their typical duties. Emily, Spencer, and Brandon were able to join the Western Capital Group for a "Tourist Day" at Niagara Falls State Park where they went on the Maid of the Mist in the Cave of the Winds and most importantly got to ride on the Trolley. Max, Spencer, and Brandon made it all the way to Green Lakes State Park to attend the Central Region's Deer Management Expo where they learned different management and research techniques from professionals with many different backgrounds.

We also had two Stewards working with our Western Capital Group, Allyson Williams and Zachary Skowronski, both from the University at Buffalo's Engineering Department. Allyson spent her summer working alongside our Senior Engineer, Nancy Busch, and was able to gain a tremendous amount of hands-on field experience. You could often find her completing daily site evaluations, researching materials, and assisting Nancy during contractor meetings. Zach spent his time with our Senior Landscape Architect, Eleanor Gaddi, completing similar tasks. He was often reviewing plans, completing site evaluations, meeting with contractors, and completing any other task given. Zach is continuing his internship into the fall part-time, still working alongside Elle.

This group donated countless hours of their time to the parks in our region and every bit of their hard work has been greatly appreciated and applauded by park staff, management, and patrons alike.



Chloe collecting a water sample at the Ford Drainage Ditch within Woodlawn Beach State Park. Photo: OPRHP

The Force Behind FORCES Picture Page



Pollinator Steward, Delia Ablard, and Horticulture Technician, Max McCune, standing in a patch of brown-eyed Susan at the Taughannock Falls Overlook Pollinator Garden.



SUNY ESF students at Saturday of Service at Chittenango Falls State Park.



Alison Kocek measuring the length of the wing of a northern cardinal. Photo by Rozi Mori Millet.



Finger Lakes FORCES Stewards and seasonal staff assisting the Plant Materials Program at Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion State Historic Park.



FORCES, NYSDEC, and USFWS conducting population surveys of the Chittenango ovate amber snail.



Photos: OPRHP



Niagara Region Stewards Brandon, Spencer, & Emily smiling after getting up close and personal with the Horseshoe Falls on the Maid of the Mist boat at Niagara Falls State Park.



Tom Hughes talking macroinvertebrates at Trainapalooza at Watkins Glen State Park.



A hike under the falls during Trainapalooza at Watkins Glen 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
Fall Edition 2022

FORCES Team

Amy Kochem

FORCES Program Coordinator

Tom Hughes

Natural Resource Stewardship Biologist
FORCES Program Manager, Central Region

Josh Teeter

Environmental Educator
FORCES Program Manager, Finger Lakes Region

Carlin Wakefield

FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region

Alexandra Tillman

FORCES Program Specialist, Niagara Region

Kelly Punch

NYS Parks Corps SCA AmeriCorps
FORCES Program Specialist, Central Region

Joshua DiPaola

Natural Resource Specialist, Taconic Region

Adele Wellman

Environmental Educator, Allegany Region

Tom LeBlanc

Naturalist, Allegany Region



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