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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.

15 Years of FORCES

Tom Hughes, NRS Biologist
Central Region FORCES Program Manager

FORCES celebrates its 15th anniversary this year! We really enjoy reflecting on how much our program has grown over the years. With over 2,000 students from dozens of different institutions involved since we started, FORCES continues to engage Stewards and partners in several Park Regions across NY State. Of course, we are always grateful for all the contributions from our college students and campus clubs. Please read all about FORCES alum Brandyn Balch's experiences at SUNY Geneseo and his eventual employment with the NYS DEC (page 5). More recently, FORCES alum Sarah Olney (*Steward Spotlight*, page 2) also landed a permanent job with the NYS DEC. Congrats Sarah!

Our connections to collegiate organizations and faculty have been so valuable over the years. These academic and collaborative relationships have been foundational to the FORCES program, with a very rich history. Some of our earliest Stewardship projects were with faculty and students at Hartwick College's Pine Lake Environmental Campus and Robert V. Riddell State Park (see a recent reunion photo below). We are creating new opportunities all the time—see our *Faculty Highlight* with Dr. N. Qwynne Lackey from SUNY Cortland (page 4). Qwynne shares our same spirit for working together, and we look forward to future collaboration!

Trails Coordinator Billy Sullivan and I toured the greenhouse at Hartwick College with Drs. Peter Fauth and Zsuzsanna Balogh-Brunstad.



We have many other collaborations ongoing and emerging that we are excited about, including NYS Parks Corps, SCA AmeriCorps (page 7) and NYS Parks' Ladders to The Outdoors (pages 10 & 11). Please stay tuned for our Fall FORCES newsletter where we will be sharing more regarding Stewardship, FORCES and Ladders To The Outdoors!

LADDERS TO THE OUTDOORS



A Ladders To The Outdoors participant from the Syracuse Police Athletics/Activities League enjoys fishing at Clark Reservation.

ATTENTION FORCES ALUMNI !!!



New Staff Member Highlight: Joyce Lytle

FORCES Program Specialist, Niagara Region



I hold a BS in Horticulture from Colorado State University. After graduating, I worked as a Sustainability Intern for The Presidio National Parks, San Francisco, CA. There, I assisted the Native Plants Nursery, Composting, Community Gardens and Integrated Pest Management teams in habitat restoration efforts and leading volunteer programs. Once my year-long internship ended, I began my career as a Landscape Gardener with the City and County of San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department. There, I worked to maintain and beautify several of San Francisco's parks, again leading volunteers of all ages to restore native habitat in an urban setting, utilizing sustainable practices. After over a decade with San Francisco Parks, my family and I decided to make the journey home, to New York State. Currently I reside in Lewiston.

Steward Spotlight: Sarah Olney

Ecosystems Health and Habitat Protection Steward, NYS DEC Region 7

I began my MPS in Conservation Science at SUNY ESF in 2021 and have been working with the FORCES team since September of 2022 as an Ecosystems Health and Habitat Protection Steward for the NYS DEC in Region 7. During my time, I earned the FORCES Service Award for most hours worked in the Fall 2022 semester (264 hours total) and continued to work with the DEC until May 25th when the internship turned into a job offer for a permanent Biologist position. My duties have focused on wetland, lake, and stream protection and permitting activities as well as pursuit of wetland and stream/lake state law violations. In my free time, I enjoy creating literally all art (digital media, paint, sculpting, drawing, wood work, stitch, etc.) reading, and writing, as well as gardening and baking. I may have too many hobbies, but that's ok. My bubbly personality will take me higher as I pursue a career protecting and restoring the environment.

Thank you so much for all you have helped me accomplish. I literally could not have attained this position without the FORCES internship and I am so grateful for this opportunity. I hope there are many other success stories from this program!



"I was able to make many professional connections with educational coordinators that could lead me to additional internships and professional opportunities."

~Grace Kritz, SUNY ESF

Coordinator's Corner

Amy Kochem, FORCES Program Coordinator

What an incredible spring of project happenings! So many tasks completed and such valuable, hands-on experience gained. Stewards participated in unique project work including hemlock woolly adelgid monitoring, raptor surveys, wildlife tracking, native plantings, and lots of environmental education. We always encourage our Stewards to take advantage of the many different field experiences offered during their time with us—you never know what you might find an unexpected passion for or what potential networking connection you'll meet!

Our 8th Annual FORCES Leadership Summit was held on April 16th at the Museum of the Earth in Ithaca. Several participants displayed academic posters and enjoyed a self-guided tour of the museum. Dave Hall, naturalist, author, and co-founder of *Primitive Pursuits*, presented on his observations and beaver monitoring adventures.

In April, we welcomed Joyce Lytle, FORCES Program Specialist in the Niagara Region (see page 2), to our team! Joyce brings lots of great energy, creativity, and enthusiasm to the FORCES program, and we look forward to seeing her succeed in the Niagara Region!



8th Annual FORCES Leadership Summit participants. Photo: OPRHP

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***Denotes active FORCES Clubs**

Honeoye/Middle High School
Liverpool 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

Faculty Highlight: N. Qwynne Lackey, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, SUNY Cortland Recreation, Parks and Leisure Studies Department



N. Qwynne Lackey is an assistant professor in the Department of Recreation, Parks and Leisure Studies (RPLS) at SUNY Cortland. She recently moved to upstate New York in 2020 after earning her Ph.D. from the University of Utah, where she specialized in sustainable tourism development and quality of life in and around parks and protected areas. At SUNY Cortland, her primary job is teaching courses in environmental and outdoor education and natural resource management. This work allows her to spend a lot of time outdoors with students, connecting them to the wonderful natural and cultural resources in upstate New York and helping them practice skills that they will use in their future careers. She also collaborates with partners in the RPLS Department, the University of Utah, and the National Parks Conservation Association to complete a variety of research projects and efforts to improve access to parks and improve the quality of life for people who work and live in and around those spaces.

Qwynne's journey to where she is now was not so straightforward. Originally, after growing up in rural Michigan, she pursued a career in the biological sciences with the intent to specialize in marine ecology. She completed internships working with injured raptors and in South Africa working with great white sharks. Through these experiences, she discovered that her true passion was actually teaching and inspiring people to lead a more environmentally conscious life. She pursued a Master's degree at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the Human Dimensions of Natural Resource Management, and had the opportunity to study with the National Association for Interpretation and also returned to South Africa to learn from renowned safari guide trainers. After these experiences, she began her Ph.D. program at the University of Utah, working on projects with the National Parks Service and several gateway communities near parks.

Through all these experiences, the greatest takeaway she learned is the power of collaboration. People are capable of achieving such great success when they are able to work together, identifying priorities and pooling resources to achieve shared goals. This is at the heart of all her current work with students and partners locally, nationally, and around the world.

SUNY ESF

Gillian Smith, Club President



During the Spring of 2023, ESF FORCES offered its members many opportunities to meet and talk with professionals from Parks and Rec and participate in recreational activities. These professionals included presentations from Delaney Kalsman about the Chittenango ovate amber snail, Mike Serviss about the American hart's-tongue fern and hemlock woolly adelgid, Kennedy Sullivan about the piping plover project, and Carlin Wakefield about foraging in nature. We also had a special guest, Nathan Wehr come and give a presentation on the importance of hunting and hunting opportunities in NYS Parks and public DEC managed land. We had 4 recreational opportunities—to plant and propagate cacti with the Plant Propagation Club; go on a trip to Chittenango

Falls State Park; attend the FORCES Leadership Summit; and make totes from old FORCES t-shirts. It was a productive semester, and we hope to offer more volunteer and recreational opportunities for members in the future.

Alumni Spotlight: Brandyn Balch

Research Scientist 2,

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's Bureau of Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health



Dear FORCES,

I was delighted when Amy Kochem reached out to me about this highlight. Not a week goes by that I don't think back fondly on my FORCES days! It was a career-shaping experience for which I will be forever grateful.

From 2015 to 2017, I was President of FORCES at SUNY Geneseo (Geography class of 2017!), and had the privilege of working with some extraordinary, highly driven individuals. Erica Matykiewicz and Carley Karpinski formalized the club in 2014 with help from Dr. Kernan in the Geography department, which fit nicely into a multi-departmental ambition to establish a partnership between SUNY Geneseo and Letchworth State Park. When Matykiewicz and Karpinski graduated the following year and left this brand new organization in the hands of us lower classmen, we were faced with the task of helping it flourish-- and flourish it did!

As President, I built the programmatic infrastructure and steered our general direction, but it was my fellow executive leadership and our dedicated, passionate body of volunteers that made it so successful. Key leaders included Ryan Colling (Biology), Keven Hauser (Geography), Amelia Mindich (Geology), Corey Hensen (Geology), Tori Roberts (Geography), Steven Sicari (Applied Mathematics), Kyle Sanduski (Biology), and others!

Ryan was Vice President but we felt more like Co-Presidents in how we collaborated. He also played a major role in my undergraduate research, helping me to evaluate the health of hemlock ravine ecosystems as a baseline in Letchworth before the hemlock woolly adelgid caused their decline. During our tenure, FORCES contributed a collective total of 1700 hours to trail maintenance, invasive species surveys, group camping trips, public education, youth outreach, streambank restoration, fundraising, and more. Our work was recognized in 2016 when we received the Geneseo Foundation Volunteer and Service Award, the Livingston County Environmental Management Council Earth Day Award, and the FORCES Leadership Award.

Ryan and I both graduated in 2017 and left the group in highly capable hands. I'm pleased to look back on our Facebook page and see it continues to remain very active. I went on to obtain a Master's in Geography from West Virginia University, then worked as a geospatial scientist in California for four years. My experience with FORCES was a major talking point in every interview, and I am certain it opened many doors for me-- but none more directly than the one it opened just recently.

Two months ago I came full circle when I accepted the Research Scientist 2 position with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Bureau of Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health in Albany. I now leverage emergent geospatial technology to monitor and model forest ecosystems, and engage with the very same survey datasets that my FORCES team and I contributed to almost a decade ago. It's wonderful to be back in my home state, and I can safely say that FORCES helped me obtain my dream job.

Thank you FORCES, Letchworth, and SUNY Geneseo Geography!

All the best,

Brandyn

Finger Lakes Update

Carlin Wakefield, FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region



FORCES Conservation Stewards posing before working on trail maintenance at Chimney Bluffs State Park. Photo: OPRHP

It was a fun and productive spring season here in the Finger Lakes Region. We welcomed four new Student Conservation Association (SCA) educators to our team—Finn Henderson, Alyssa Rosenberger, Scott Higgins, and Maggie McDonald. Along with leading tours and field trips, this crew assisted the FORCES program and worked closely with us on many projects this spring including raptor surveys and wildlife tracking at Long Point State Park, tracking and hemlock surveys at Jennings Pond (where we found fresh fisher tracks), and assisting at the Richard E. Reynold's Game Farm in Ithaca, NY.

Conservation Stewards from Ithaca College included Mattix Lufrano, Abigail Aitken, Kelly Warren, and Julia DiGeronimo. These students dedicated a combined total of 630 hours of volunteerism towards New York State Parks on a variety of different projects. Some of the highlights

from this spring's field work included assisting with trail drainage maintenance at Chimney Bluffs and Two Rivers State Parks, shrub trimming to clear the trail corridor and native species planting at Sampson State Park, camera trap surveys at Jennings Pond, and turtle nest site cleanup at Mark Twain State Park on the Catherine Valley Trail. We also worked with Two Rivers Jr. Conservation Steward Josie Vandyke from Waverly Central Schools on wildlife monitoring.

In March, we assisted Cornell's New York State Hemlock Initiative (NYSHI) Lab with hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) overwintering mortality surveys at Fillmore Glen, Watkins Glen, Taughannock Falls, Buttermilk Falls and Robert H. Treman State Parks. We found **high** (90+%) mortality at Fillmore Glen, Buttermilk Falls and Robert H. Treman, and around 70% mortality at Taughannock Falls and Watkins Glen. This is great to know that our cold snaps do kill off HWA, and our colder climate give us somewhat of an advantage in New York State compared to states in the southern range of HWA's infestation.

We had a ton of fun taking a trip to Rochester to listen to a speech by *Braiding Sweetgrass* author, Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, helping the Plant Materials Program de-mulch their seedlings and having a seed swap party, posting educational signs to discourage ramp harvesting, monitoring our bluebird nest boxes around the Ithaca areas parks, and hosting Ithaca College students for their lab section at Buttermilk Falls State Park, where FORCES Stewards helped lead students in benthic macroinvertebrate water quality monitoring and a hemlock stand assessment.

Many great times were had, friendships formed, and inside jokes created. Thank you to each and every one of our dedicated Spring Stewards for your hard work, positive attitude, and deep care of our Parks!



SCA and FORCES Stewards dissecting HWA under microscopes for the overwintering mortality survey at the New York State Hemlock Initiative Lab at Cornell University. Photo: OPRHP

"I appreciate FORCES for the networking it provides, as well as the skill building and knowledge!"

~Abigail Aitken, Ithaca College

Partner Highlight: Zachary Russell

Program Coordinator, SCA, NYS Parks Corps, The Student Conservation Association, Inc.



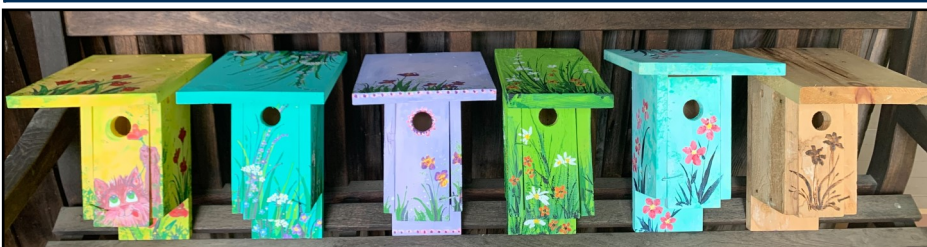
Hi there! My name is Zachary Russell, and I'm the Program Coordinator for the SCA New York State Parks Corps. Over the past two years in this position, it's been an absolute pleasure to work with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation along with the FORCES program.

I grew up in Connecticut, just outside of New York City, and spent much of my childhood visiting parks around New York's Hudson Valley Region. After graduating high school in 2010, I studied meteorology at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. Things didn't go as I planned, and I graduated with a degree in environmental science in 2013. Since then, I've been a tour guide in Chicago, zipline

instructor in New Hampshire, SCA member in New York City, Program Coordinator for a non-profit in Connecticut, and a Site Supervisor for a multi-state demolition company. Throughout this time, my goal has been to increase the role intersectional environmentalism has in my work. Bringing accessibility, equity, and inclusion to the environmental landscape will always be my focus, and this position with the SCA allows just that.

As the Program Coordinator for the New York State Parks Corps, my work covers recruitment of could-be stewards from across the globe, the facilitation of important trainings to bolster member resumes, and the day-to-day operation of the Corps. With a "home base" just outside of Ithaca, I spend much of my time in the field visiting the members in state parks across the Niagara, Allegany, Genesee, Finger Lakes, Central, and Thousand Islands regions.

The SCA New York State Parks Corps wouldn't be what it is without its partnership with the FORCES program, and with our eighth season coming up, I can't wait to see what we accomplish together!



Do you know what New York State's official bird is? The eastern bluebird of course! Our FORCES Program and our partners are proud to contribute to conservation projects "for the birds" all around NY State, including the eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*). One of the most favorite activities for our

FORCES Stewards around the state is to conserve and protect the eastern bluebird and its habitats, including building nest boxes at the New York State Fair. Many thanks to a talented artist volunteer (who wished to remain anonymous) who purchases, paints, and donates the nest boxes back to our agency. Because of their generous donation, we will have several of their bluebird boxes to give away at the NYS Fair this year!

Are you interested in building your own bluebird nest box or assisting others? If so, please plan on joining us at this year's NYS Fair from August 23 to September 4, 2023. Our FORCES Staff and Stewards construct over 1,200 boxes each year, so we could use your help!



Central Region Update

Mike Serviss, Stewardship Biologist; Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Project Coordinator, Delaney Kalsman, Stewardship Specialist; Alden Huxtable, NYS Parks Corps, SCA AmeriCorps, Environmental Educator; Kelly Punch, SCA AmeriCorps FORCES Program Specialist

The American hart's-tongue fern (AHTF) conservation project continued along with great momentum here in the Central Region. Most of our work focused on propagation of the threatened species at Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion. As winter ended, the ferns broke dormancy in their raised beds next to the Plant Materials Program greenhouse and we found good survival following their first winter outside. In total, over 300 ferns survived the winter and we plan to use those ferns to augment three AHTF populations in Onondaga and Madison counties! We worked on some early season invasive species management with the SUNY Morrisville Invasive Species Management Lab at Clark Reservation and we welcomed our new Fern Crew for the Summer season.



AHTF wake up from dormancy at Sonnenberg Gardens. Photo: OPRHP



Kyle Webster, State Parks Botanist for the New York Natural Heritage Program, helps to locate the critically imperiled common roseroot at Chittenango Falls. Photo: OPRHP



Additionally, we confirmed the continued presence of a cliff-dwelling plant neighbor of the hart's-tongue fern at Chittenango Falls, the common roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*), a critically imperiled (S1) species in New York State. Many thanks to our partners at the New York Natural Heritage Program for assistance with locating this rare plant!

Switching gears to hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) management, it was yet another busy winter and early spring as HWA continues to invade into the Central Region. Our Environmental Field Team and network of dedicated volunteers helped to survey over 1,200 acres of hemlock forest in 15 parks, which is nearly 70% of all of our hemlock forests in the region. Wow, amazing work! We found new HWA infestations at Bowman Lake and Battle Island State Parks and have already completed initial management work at Bowman Lake. Additionally, we partnered with the Cornell University New York State Hemlock Initiative and SLELO PRISM to release a biocontrol species at one of our more heavily invaded parks on the leading edge of HWA spread northward, Selkirk Shores.

~Mike

The New York Great Lakes Piping Plover Project at Sandy Island Beach State Park began their spring season strong with getting involved in educational outreach. Tyler Lee (SCA AmeriCorps) and Kennedy Sullivan (Project Coordinator) traveled across the Central Region spreading the word about the plight of the Great Lakes piping plover population and the core of the project. Tyler went to Zoo New York in Watertown, NY to speak with a youth group, with Kennedy tabling for Earth Day. The two went to SUNY ESF to speak with FORCES, the Wildlife Society, and the Birding Club to recruit Stewards for the summer season. The Great Swamp Conservancy invited Kennedy to their visitor center to speak with the public, all events leading to great success (continued page 10)!

Central Region Update (cont'd)

Mike Serviss, Stewardship Biologist; Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Project Coordinator, Delaney Kalsman, Stewardship Specialist; Alden Huxtable, NYS Parks Corps, SCA AmeriCorps, Environmental Educator; Kelly Punch, SCA AmeriCorps FORCES Program Specialist



Kennedy Sullivan speaking with zoo visitors at Zoo New York. Photo: OPRHP

In April, our piping plovers return for another season with our recurrent females -X,-Y:-Of,Ob (“Arwen”) and Of,GB:-X,-G (“Arlene”) coming in first. -X,-R:-Of,GG (“Aragorn”) and -Of,LO:-X,-Y/O (“Ajax”) come right after them and immediately pair up. Arwen and Aragorn, with Ajax and Arlene, take their respective territories on the beach and begin nesting. The project works again with NYSDEC at Lakeview Wildlife Management Area for another season with their own nesting pair. The male, -O/Gdot,-L/O:-X,-L(262) (“Hawkeye”), is a returning chick from 2022 from Sandy Island and this will be his first season as a breeding adult. Good luck Hawkeye!

With piping plover nesting, the project with USFWS, SUNY ESF, and NYSDEC worked together to install predator exclosures. Predator exclosures serve to protect the nests from aerial and land predators. Without exclosures, it would be difficult for piping plovers to have a successful breeding season. Federal and state permits are required to do this work. Nice job, team!



Hawkeye's first day back. Photo: OPRHP

Now, with nesting piping plovers, the project will soon be looking out for hatching chicks and have a very busy season! The team works diligently over the weekends educating patrons about their local piping plovers, the only ones from the Great Lakes population in New York State.

~Kennedy



OPRHP, NYSDEC, SUNY ESF, and USFWS putting up an exclosure. Photo: OPRHP



Educator Cara Gannon, and SCA FORCES Program Specialist Kelly Punch, show *Black Girls Don't Get Love* members how to make a fire. Photo: OPRHP

My name is Alden Huxtable and I am a senior at SUNY Cobleskill studying Wildlife Management. I am currently interning with New York State Parks Corps through the Student Conservation Association as an Environmental Education Steward this summer! I, along with Katie Mulverhill, Cara Gannon, and Bryan Radder of our Environmental Education Team, have been very busy this season with field trips and our Ladders to the Outdoors program here at Green Lakes State Park (continued page 11).

LADDERS TO THE OUTDOORS



Central Region Update (cont'd)

Mike Serviss, Stewardship Biologist; Kennedy Sullivan, Piping Plover Project Coordinator, Delaney Kalsman, Stewardship Specialist; Alden Huxtable, NYS Parks Corps, SCA AmeriCorps Environmental Educator; Kelly Punch, SCA AmeriCorps FORCES Program Specialist



Isaiah Scott leading a bird walk for *Black Girls Don't Get Love* members. Photo: OPRHP

We have had a blast getting to educate over 1,300 kids this season! Our programs focus on the science and control of erosion, how nature sculpted Green Lakes State Park, the science behind our *rare* meromictic lakes, and ecosystem encounters. Each class gets to enjoy the experience of visiting the park, all while learning about science, history, and nature! Our work with the Ladders to the Outdoors program is now ramping up as field trip season ends and we transition to various programs such as guided hikes about camping and hiking, bird walks, and kayaking.

We do a lot of work with the local Boys and Girls Clubs of the area, and it is an amazing experience getting to show young minds the great outdoors who may not otherwise have the opportunity!

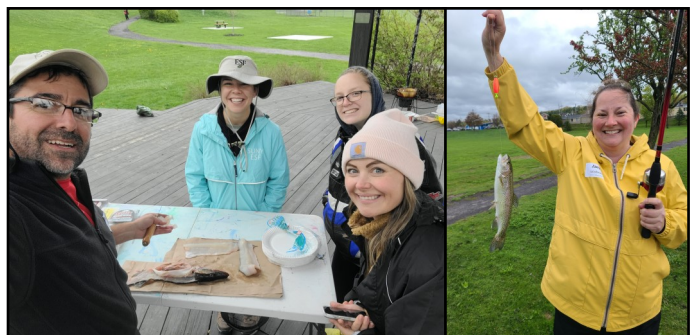
Wildlife Management in the Central Region primarily focused on nuisance animal management this spring. This included the continuation of the Canada goose Egg Oiling Program. Stewardship Specialist Delaney Kalsman surveyed 7 parks for Canada goose nesting. During the survey, 7 nests were identified. However, only 2 were treated for a total of 12 eggs oiled. The other nests were either destroyed by natural events or were too far along in development to oil. The oiling of undeveloped goose eggs is important to help deter the geese from the area and future nesting. Beaver dams were also a main focus of wildlife management this season. A historical and inactive beaver dam was removed in Green Lakes State Park to help alleviate flooding on adjacent private land. Additionally, a 60-foot beaver dam was removed from a section of the Erie Canal in Rome, NY. After the dam was removed, water levels fell over 3 feet to their historical levels. The Central Region is still trying to manage the active beavers on site.

~Delaney

Women in Nature (WIN) Outdoor Skills Workshop Celebrates 15th Anniversary !



Natural Resource Steward Biologist Tom Hughes once again provided instruction for *Fishing 101* at the annual WIN Workshop, sponsored by the Onondaga County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs. Tom has served on the planning committee and as *Fishing 101* instructor since the program began in 2006!



Tom demonstrates how to fillet and debone a chain pickerel, while WIN participants enjoy fishing for rainbow trout at Lower Pond in Manlius. Thank you Village of Manlius Town Board!

Be sure to mark your calendars for the 8th Annual FORCES Membership Gathering on October 10, 2023 at Letchworth State Park. This is open to all current and past FORCES Stewards and club members interested in networking, learning, and celebrating FORCES.

We hope to see many of you there!



The Force Behind FORCES Picture Page



FORCES Stewards and Plant Materials Program staff posing with the giant pile of mulch they removed off the native plant seedlings at Sonnenberg Gardens.



SCA and FORCES Stewards conducting a raptor survey on the birding platform at Two Rivers State Park.

Central Region Trails Coordinator Billy Sullivan in the halls on campus at Hartwick College. Our FORCES newsletter is proudly displayed for all to see!



Photos: OPRHP



Raquel Mennella, Crew Leader for the American hart's-tongue fern project, releases *Leucotaraxis piniperda* for biocontrol of HWA at Selkirk Shores State Park.

Photo credit: Jasmine Schmidt, NYS Hemlock Initiative.



FORCES Program Coordinator Amy Kochem presents the Special Achievement Award to Hartwick FORCES officers.



FORCES Stewards assisting Environmental Field Team staff with native plantings at Sampson State Park.



Central Region FORCES Program Manager Tom Hughes with SUNY ESF's Gillian Smith, Leadership Award recipient.



Finger Lakes FORCES Program Specialist Carlin Wakefield presents the Distinguished Service Award to Bethany Holland from Ithaca College.



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Historic Preservation**

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**FORCES Newsletter
Summer Edition 2023**

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