



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

FORCES

Friends of Recreation, Conservation, and Environmental Stewardship

Fall 2018 Newsletter

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

FORCES Sings A “New” Tune

Tom Hughes, NRS Biologist
Central Region FORCES Program Manager

As I reviewed all the awesome content in this latest issue of our newsletter, I was reminded that our FORCES teams around the Regions have been hard at work bringing so many new and amazing things to our program.

New people— FORCES Stewardship Corps in Ithaca’s “Three Gorges” Parks (page 12).

New partners— WNY Landscape Resource Center in Niagara Region (page 5), Pleasantville Lion’s Club at Rockefeller State Park Preserve (page 6) and the Empire Animal Rescue Society (EARS) at Allegany State Park (page 7).

New life— first piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) chicks in eastern Lake Ontario in over 30 years at Sandy Island Beach State Park (page 2).

Welcome *Frodo, Gimli, Pippin & Merry* — our family of plover chicks (pictured below).



Also new for 2018— we introduced our “Concert In The Park” music series, as we welcomed folk Americana band PA Line. The guys from PA Line traveled out from Buffalo to perform a public show at our 4th Annual Trainapalooza at Robert H. Treman State Park. Park patrons and our FORCES Stewards danced and sang along with the band for over two hours! We plan to have more public concerts at future FORCES events, and we hope that PA Line will come visit us again.

“Peace Always”



Central Region Update

Mike Serviss, AHTF Project Coordinator, Dallas Ortel, BCA Project Coordinator, Alivia Sheffield, Piping Plover Project Coordinator



Late summer AHTF Crew at Clark Reservation State Park. Miranda Gregory, Julian Tucci, Kelsey West, Julia Greco. Photo credit: OPRHP

The American hart's-tongue fern (AHTF) conservation project was firing on all cylinders this summer and a great deal was accomplished to bolster the survival of one of NYS's most rare and endangered plants. A total of eight regular Fern Crew members, composed of recent graduates and students from Onondaga Community College, SUNY ESF, and Le Moyne, actively participated in AHTF conservation activities between May and August. Over 40,000 invasive plants were removed from Clark Reservation and Chittenango Falls State Parks over the course of the summer. Three extant AHTF populations were censused, each exhibiting a 50-75% increase in individuals over 2012 levels! Three transplanted AHTF populations were censused on a monthly basis, showing growth and increased spore production since 2017. Over 130 flowering plant and 18 fern species were inventoried by the Fern Crew at Clark Reservation using the iNaturalist app, including identification and phenological data. Samples of Asian jumping worms were collected by the crew and identified by Finger Lakes FORCES steward Juliana Isnardi (thanks Juliana!). Twelve educational programs/guided hikes were completed for a variety of community organizations. And to cap off a tremendously busy summer, the Fern Crew assisted botanists from the New York Natural Heritage Program to locate multiple rare plant species, including roseroot (*Rhodiola rosea*) (S1) at Chittenango Falls and several occurrences of cork elm (*Ulmus thomasii*) (S2S3) at Clark Reservation.

During this past summer, stewards worked to manage multiple aspects of the Green Lakes Bird Conservation Area (BCA). This management included assisting with deer impact studies within the forested areas, assisting with biocontrol site location, trail maintenance, and the removal of over 20,000 invasive plants. The addition of deer impact studies this season was the largest change for the project recently. These studies were conducted internally using two different methods. In one method, teams worked on a bi-weekly basis to collect data within five sets of plots. These plots contained open and enclosed areas in which the ten tallest saplings were recorded for height, species, and browse. In the second method, teams were sent to randomly chosen spots within forested habitat. Measurements were taken of light density and vegetation coverage in all cardinal directions. In addition, plots were chosen at set distances in which all forest floor vegetation was identified. As part of an ongoing study, the BCA Team continued to help in data collections for an Invasive Species Research Institute (ISRI), pale swallow-wort project. These data are collected on a yearly basis and will help to show the impacts of pale swallow-wort on the environment and the effectiveness of our current management methods. As an addition to ISRI's current project, sites were located for the proposed release of the pale swallow-wort defoliating moth (*Hypena opulenta*). We hope to have caged releases in the near future! The management of the Green Lakes BCA could not be done without the help of our FORCES Stewards. Thanks to them, we are able to maintain valuable habitat for both grassland and forest bird species as well as keep the park a safe and beautiful experience for all.

The Great Lakes Piping Plover is a Federally and State Endangered shorebird that disappeared from the eastern shores of Lake Ontario for over 30 years as their population diminished to only 12 pairs in 1986. This year, 2018, a pair of Piping Plovers nested and had 100% success with 4 chicks fledging (flying), on Sandy Island Beach State Park, in Pulaski, NY. They all left on July 29th to begin their journey to their wintering grounds, south of North Carolina. We hope the four chicks, as well as their parents, make their way successfully back to raise chicks of their own back on our shores and in our state parks next summer. State Park Staff, FORCES Stewards, volunteers, as well as partner organizations were all a critical part in the success of this season.



Male adult piping plover and chick on Sandy Island Beach State Park. Photo credit: OPRHP

Coordinator's Corner

Amy Kochem, FORCES Program Coordinator

Upcoming Events

- 11/14/19 Volunteer Stewardship Day
Rockefeller State Park Preserve
- 11/25/18 Old Growth Forest Visits:
Dehgasoh Valley Woods
Letchworth State Park
- 12/8/18- Lorenzo's Christmas Celebration
12/9/18 Lorenzo State Historic Site
- 12/15/18 44th Annual Letchworth Silver
Lake Christmas Bird Count
Letchworth State Park
- 12/18/18 Paint & Learn with Piping Plovers
Pulaski Public Library
- 12/31/18 Beaver Island Blizzard Bash!
Beaver Island State Park
- 1/1/19 First Day Hike: Find an event
near you on our website
- 2/12/19- Binghamton Pond Fest
2/13/19 Chenango Valley State Park

For more information email
amy.kochem@parks.ny.gov
or visit www.nysparks.com/events

Seven FORCES Stewardship Corps Members and 54 FORCES Stewards across six NYS Park Regions was what the summer of 2018 looked like for FORCES. Our dedicated team of Stewards worked diligently on projects including wildlife monitoring, invasives management, environmental education, habitat restoration, and flora and fauna surveys. We are evermore appreciative for the hours spent on these critical projects.

Our 4th Annual Trainapalooza was held May 31st - June 1st at RH Treman State Park. With 50 Stewards and Park Staff coming together for a two-day training, it was our largest attended FORCES event yet...and two of the hottest days of the summer! After the workshop sessions and a group BBQ, evening entertainment was provided by PA Line, an Americana Folk Band out of the Buffalo area. They sang, we danced and had lots of fun being together.

This fall, we congratulated and then said goodbye to Dallas Ortel, our Green Lakes Bird Conservation Area (BCA) Coordinator. He accepted a position with Apex Industries in Syracuse working on stormwater systems. Dallas has been an asset to our staff since his start with Parks in 2016 as a NYS Strike Team Supervisor. We will certainly miss him!

The FORCES program continues to expand across NYS. We welcomed Andy Damon, Saratoga/Capital Conservation Crew Coordinator, to our FORCES Team. One of his responsibilities is to get a FORCES started in the Saratoga/Capital Region. There is lots of interest in that region and we're excited to get rolling out there.

Keep an eye out on the FORCES website for the *Who's Who* publication that will highlight all of our 2018 FORCES Stewards. Searching for a spring internship? Be sure to contact your regional FORCES staff to inquire about spring opportunities.

Affiliated Institutions

SUNY Alfred
SUNY Binghamton
SUNY Brockport
SUNY Cobleskill
SUNY Cortland
SUNY ESF*
SUNY Geneseo*
SUNY Morrisville
SUNY Oneonta*
SUNY Oswego
SUNY Purchase
Alfred University
Bucknell University

Cazenovia College
Clarkson University
Columbia College
Cornell University
Finger Lakes Community College
Hartwick College*
Hobart & William Smith Colleges
Houghton College
Ithaca College
Le Moyne College*
Niagara Community College
Niagara University
Onondaga Community College
Pace University

Paul Smith's College
Rochester Institute of Technology
St. John Fisher College
Syracuse University
University of Buffalo
University of Rochester
Vassar College
Wells College*

*Denotes active FORCES Clubs

Student Conservation Association, NYS Parks AmeriCorps Update

Madeline Simpson, FORCES Program Specialist (SCA)

This Summer, as the Student Conservation Association (SCA) FORCES Program Specialist, I was fortunate enough to participate in a variety of amazing opportunities across New York State. These experiences involved service projects, environmental education programs, exciting environmental education conferences and certifications, as well as trail and land management projects.

I had the honor of planting saplings and removing invasive species alongside the founder of the SCA, Liz Putnam, at the Vassar Farm and Ecological Preserve. I also worked alongside my fellow SCA New York Parks Corps members in the Finger Lakes Regions, where we established and marked new trails, and became certified "Leave No Trace" trainers. In July, I became a certified Kayak Instructor and have had a blast teaching Girl Scouts and individuals of all ages how to paddle in some of Central Region's finest lakes.



FORCES Stewards Bailey Park and Danielle Moyer educating Broome County Fairgoers on invasive species and sustainability. Photo credit: OPRHP

I worked alongside motivated and inspiring FORCES Stewards, assisting them in various projects and events across the Central Region. Our FORCES Stewards mapped and maintained trails, removed invasive species, and participated in surveys. We tabled and educated patrons at the Broome County Fair, assisted in exciting summer events at Chenango Valley State Park, established a pollinator garden, and distributed wood duck and bluebird nest boxes throughout Glimmerglass State Park. One of the largest and most anticipated events of the summer was the Great New York State Fair. At the fair, I worked with Parks Staff, FORCES Stewards, and club members, educating fairgoers on their native eastern bluebird and assisting them in nest box building.

It has truly been a blessing serving with SCA and FORCES. Although my service with the SCA is quickly coming to an end, I will continue to live and preach the values I have learned from New York State parks, as well as the importance of recreation, conservation, and environmental stewardship.

Genesee Region Update

Meg Janis, Natural Resource Steward Biologist

This past summer saw three FORCES stewards working out of Letchworth State Park, the highest number yet! Veronica Medina continued her SUNY Geneseo internship into a summer position assessing Big Brook for water quality changes pre- and post stream bank restoration projects. Lexie Reitler and Curtis Davis also assisted as Conservation Stewards. They worked on invasive species mapping and control, vegetation assessments for deer browse and deer exclosure research, pollinator habitat restoration and surveys. They were able to partner with WNY PRISM on a research project to control a newer invasive, slender false brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*). All three also assisted with education and outreach a few days during the summer, hosting an invasive species table at Letchworth's Humphrey Nature Center during Invasive Species Awareness Week and creating a bear awareness program for the Teddy Bear picnic hosted by the Friends of Letchworth.



Lexie Reitler in the jungle of vegetation growing in a deer exclosure. Photo credit: OPRHP

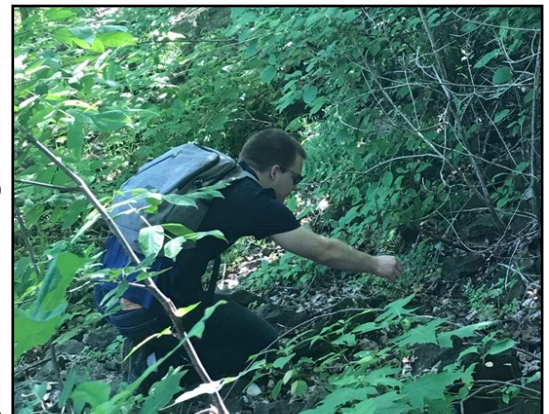
Overall, it was a busy season, working on a broad array of projects, all helping to forward the goal of environmental stewardship at Letchworth State Park!

Niagara Region Update

Jillian Harris, FORCES Program Specialist

This was the summer of new and exciting opportunities for the FORCES program in the Niagara Region. Zach Glaspy, Conservation Steward, installed deer exclosures and created a deer management plan for Evangola State Park. Marta Szumski and Cassidy Okon, Invasive Species Management Stewards, worked on an invasive species management plan for Beaver Island State Park and conducted thorough surveys within the park to help determine high priority spots. Hannah Annunziata, Conservation/Water Quality Steward, assisted in water quality sampling used for daily swimming operations and collection of data information for future wetland restoration projects at Woodlawn Beach State Park. Harrison “Quin” Watkins, Conservation Steward, assisted greenhouse operations at the WNY Landscape Resource Center, working under the program manager, Kevin McNallie. Carley McMullen, Invasive Species Management Steward, worked on surveying regional parks for Tree of Heaven, known host plant of the Spotted Lanternfly. Renae Sentiff, Invasive Species Management Steward, conducted surveys at Golden Hill State Park, marking off areas of high invasiveness within a proposed pheasant hunting area.

Along with all of the individual projects our Stewards worked on, we had quite a few events held that they helped run and participated in. At the beginning of the summer, the Nature Study class from Niagara University learned about the State Parks Native Plant Policy all while making seed bombs, which were then dispersed into the Niagara Gorge in an area being restored by the Western New York Land Conservancy. During Pollinator Week, FORCES Stewards teamed up with Interpretive Staff to spruce up the Fort Niagara Nature Center garden beds by removing weeds, cutting back overgrown plants, and adding native pollinator plants. Past Former FORCES Steward Angelina Presutti also joined in with some staff from Fort Niagara. Hannah and Quin had the pleasure of joining WNY Land Conservancy Ecologist, Pricilla Titus, on a seed collection hike down the Niagara Gorge, looking for wild columbine and other native seeding plants.



Harrison “Quin” Watkins is shown collecting wild columbine down in the Niagara Gorge during a hike with Pricilla Titus from the WNY Land Conservancy. Photo credit: OPRHP



Cassidy Okon poses with the “clean the boat” game at the Invasive Species Carnival at Four Mile Creek State Park. Photo credit: OPRHP

We ended Invasive Species Awareness Week (ISAW) with a bang, by working with our regional interpretive office and the Watercraft Inspection Program, to put on our first ever Invasive Species Carnival. The Carnival was held at three regional parks over a two-day span, with games such as “Clean the Boat”, invasive species bottle toss, and the ever popular fishing game. Roughly 100 patrons came out to the parks to learn about various invasive species and what they could do to help stop the spread, all while having fun! All our FORCES Stewards had the opportunity to work with the Aquatic and Terrestrial Strike Teams throughout the summer, working on removing Japanese knotweed, flowering rush, cup plant, and pale swallow-wort. As always, the summer truly ended when our stewards helped table at the Erie County Fair.

Many of our stewards went back to school, with only three staying on for the fall semester and one new student from the University of Buffalo. The fall holds many more opportunities for our stewards, including opportunities to plant trees, collect locally native seeds for restoration purposes, conduct gypsy moth surveys, and design future pollinator meadows.

Taconic Region Update

Rebecca Policello, Natural Resource Specialist

It has been an extremely busy summer for Rockefeller State Park Preserve with lots of work to go around. The staff welcomed the help from some of the local FORCES Stewards that joined the Stewardship crew this field season. During the early summer, high school seniors Jordan Claman, Krishna Patel, and Adam Ross assisted the Stewardship staff with the ongoing invasive species removals and habitat restoration projects taking place on the 1500 acre preserve. Jordan, Krishna, and Adam spent many hot, humid days digging up European Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*), pulling out Japanese angelica tree (*Aralia elata*), and removing a patch of black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) from fields and forest edges. The FORCES Stewards also joined up with some of our volunteer groups for larger scale invasive removal projects, including one project with the Pleasantville Lion's Club to remove a hedgerow from the center of a field.



Rockefeller State Park Preserve crew and FORCES Stewards. Photo credit: OPRHP

Later in the summer, our team grew by two as our collegiate stewards Lindsey Thurston (SUNY New Paltz) and Patrick Robertson (Ithaca College) joined. Their focus was black swallow-wort monitoring, Mile-a-Minute vine removal, and deer monitoring projects. Lindsey and Patrick both helped with our annual Deer Spotlighting Survey to estimate deer density and “Ten Tallest” sampling to monitor deer browse on tree saplings.

Lindsey helped lead groups of high school students from Groundworks Hudson Valley, who were hired to work on invasive removal in the area behind the office. This area became a regular spot for invasive work because it is the first habitat visitors see when entering the park so we’re hoping to show what a healthy forest should look like.

This spring, many of our carriage roads were rebuilt along the Pocantico River. These roads were highly valued for their abundance of wildflowers and absence of invasive species. All our FORCES stewards worked to help restore the road edges by transplanting native ferns, spreading native grasses and sedges, and installing jute netting to reduce erosion.

“My experiences of working through difficult situations in the field such as weather and fatigue will always help me in life. These situations taught me that hard work will get the job done and that it is always worth it to push through adversity. I can confidently say that I enjoyed every single experience I had. Thank you so much for the wonderful opportunity, FORCES and NYS Parks will always be a part of my life.”

Sean Korbas, SUNY ESF

Allegany Region Update

Tom Le Blanc, Environmental Educator

In the summer of 2018, the Allegany Region FORCES team assembled a “Dog Days of Summer” event for Allegany State Park. This event focused on 33 dogs and their trainers who attended an obstacle course and then followed with a pet parade. FORCES staff contacted Empire Animal Rescue Society (EARS) to attend and they found many homes to those pets looking for adoptions. Purina was very generous for dog and cat food to all participants and the extra donations were then given to EARS for future adoptees.



Allegany Region FORCES team at the Dog Days of Summer event. Left to Right: FORCES Staff: Jessica Fite, Courtney Whisenant and Georgia Shaw. SCA Staff: Zachary Matuch and Amelia Staver. Park Staff: Ryan Lee (former FORCES Steward). Photo credit: OPRHP



FORCES Environmental Interpretation Stewards. Left to Right: Courtney Whisenant, Gabriella Ripa, Georgia Shaw, Jessica Fite, Emily Timkey. Photo credit: OPRHP

A huge shout out to the Western NY Strike Team who travel to State Parks in the western portions of NYS State, tirelessly managing invasive species.




Western NY Strike Team takes a break after removing pale swallow-wort at Clark Reservation State Park. Left to Right: Emily Wilson, Jaclyn Ruhl, Owen Hill, Phil Bossert. Photo credit: OPRHP

For more information about 2018 FORCES Stewards, see the *Who's Who* publication coming soon to our website

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2018 FORCES STEWARDS: THE FORCE



Emily Ammons
 Invasive Sp. Mgmt. Steward

Originally from Shrewsbury, MA, Emily attends SUNY Cortland and double majors in Biology and Mathematics. She enjoys playing with her dogs, reading, and learning new things. After she completes her undergraduate degree, Emily hopes to earn a master's degree and start a job where she can make enough money to spoil her dogs like they deserve!



Hannah Annunziata
 Invasive Sp. Mgmt. Steward

While attending Buffalo University, Hannah is working towards her Bachelors of Science in Environmental Geosciences. She grew up in Buffalo, NY and enjoys hiking, reading, and soccer. Hannah's goals include graduating a semester early and then after college, starting her career and beginning the next chapter of her life; hopefully doing field work and/or research.

Faculty Highlight: Chris Collins

Chris Collins, Assistant Professor of Biology, St. John Fisher College

As a wildlife biologist at St. John Fisher College, I get the chance go see the hidden lives of animals. For several years now, I have been studying wildlife at Ganondagan State Historic Site, with assistance of one of my students, Taylor Chamberlain, and the staff. My research uses various types of equipment to study wildlife while having as little impact on their behavior as possible. One of my favorite research tools are motion-activated camera traps (or “trail cams”), which are often used by hunters to scout for deer. They are more than just a hunter’s toy, they are a powerful tool for viewing wildlife, estimating population sizes, and recording behaviors that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to observe.

Last fall, one of my cameras recorded two white-tailed deer bucks sparring during the rutting season, the time of year when bucks compete for mates. The two bucks fought directly in front of the camera, horns locked, for several hours. As they fought they pushed each other back and forth, trampling the grass over a wide area. And then they stopped, took a break, and grazed peacefully side-by-side for a few hours, before resuming their contest again for another few hours.

Another camera was placed near a “raccoon latrine.” These are logs, boulders, or other objects that are used as community toilets by raccoons. Over the course of a few weeks, I photographed dozens of raccoons using the latrine, each leaving their unique scent mark. Raccoons are social animals, and scientists believe that this allows them to keep track of which other raccoons live in the area. It’s the raccoon equivalent of social media. They can “post a message” by depositing droppings (also called scat), and reply to the messages of other raccoons.



Night time is sparring time for these two young white-tailed deer bucks. Photo credit: Chris Collins



A red fox poses for the camera. Photo credit: Chris Collins

Another research project I’ve been working on is a study of how grassland fires change the abundance of small mammals, like mice and voles. The staff at Ganondagan have been using carefully controlled fires as a way of removing invasive species and encouraging the growth of native species. The use of fire to shape habitats has a long history. Ganondagan was, historically, the site of a Seneca settlement, and the site continues to be of historic and cultural significance to the Seneca. Many Native American cultures, including the Seneca, used fire to keep land clear for agriculture, and provide grazing areas for deer and other animals they hunted. By using fire, we are re-introducing a historically important land management practice. My research has shown that burned areas recover quickly, and have increased mammal biodiversity.

“I feel that my experience will benefit my future academic/professional opportunities as I believe that I have acquired a better skillset aimed towards what I wish to pursue and have more relevant knowledge to supplement future work ie—plant ID, tool use, etc.”

Juliana Isnardi –Ithaca College

Steward Spotlight: Lindsey Thurston

Lindsey Thurston, Rockefeller State Park Preserve



Driving through a yellow field on a bright, warm day in early July, I placidly thought to myself that I am happy to be at work. For my first summer with FORCES, I worked as a Conservation Steward at Rockefeller State Park Preserve. I am a junior Environmental Geochemical Science major at SUNY New Paltz. Volunteering with FORCES allowed me to explore my interest in ecology and the field of conservation. For two months I worked under Rebecca Policello, Rockefeller's Natural Resource Specialist, who introduced me to the park's ongoing conservation project to restore the forest canopy.

I worked alongside Rockefeller's conservation team to monitor and protect the park's native species. The primary threats to the local biodiversity were the Japanese angelica tree, barberry, black swallow-wort, porcelain berry, and mile-a-minute. Without natural predators, these plants grow quickly and out-compete the native plants. The pervasive deer population in Rockefeller much prefer the familiar native plants to the thorny, foreign, invasive ones.

To cultivate native plant growth, it is important to first gauge their progression. "Ten Tallest" is a current research project regarding monitoring native sapling

growth at specific locations across the preserve. I spent a few days touring the preserve with my coworkers using a map to hunt for the site markers. At each location, we measured the height of specified native species within a five-foot radius and compared them to the values from the previous years. We also made note of any signs of browsing. This project assesses the effectiveness of the strategy being used. We were happy to see a positive growth trend this year.

I devoted many of my days to pulling and cutting invasive plants throughout the park and installing tubes around native ones. The tubes provide the saplings with protection until they grow tall enough to avoid hungry deer. There is no quick fix when altering an ecosystem; this is not a job that will produce immediate results. Identifying the best methods for removing invasives and restoring habitat health takes time. The Rockefeller conservation team works to prevent the spread of invasives and eventually eradicate them to make room for native plants.

This was such a valuable experience for me because I'm a person who learns best by doing. I gained new skills in plant identification, monitoring, data collection, and ecosystem management. Any student with an interest in environmental science can benefit from a hands-on learning experience with FORCES. I am confident that this experience will open new doors for me in the future. And, as a plus, I spent my whole summer outside. The Rockefeller team welcomed me with open arms and I feel so lucky to have taken part in their project. These are some of the warmest people I have met, it was a pleasure to work alongside them. I will carry this learning experience with me through my career as an environmental engineer.

Finger Lakes Region Update

Lindsay Dombroskie, FORCES Program Specialist

It was another action-packed summer in the Finger Lakes Region with 10 FORCES Stewards contributing to a wide array of projects. FORCES Conservation Stewards included Thomas Minett, Kali Oaks, Juliana Isnardi, with high school student Emma Williamson joining later in the summer. This group worked together on projects that varied weekly and are discussed later. Stephanie Minarik held the same title, but independently



FORCES Conservation Stewards Thomas and Julianna apply a general scent lure in the hopes of capturing photos of river otter at Jennings Pond. Photo credit: OPRHP

studied the early stages of a pollinator garden project at Long Point State Park for internship credit. Invasive Species Management Stewards Jeremy Collings and Emily Ammons were paid interns working for SUNY Cortland researcher Andrea Dávalos on her pale swallow-wort project; joining FORCES provided better NYS Parks context, access, and support for their work at Taughannock and Buttermilk Falls State Parks. Environmental Health Steward Alicia Musk surveyed Fillmore Glen and Long Point State Parks in June for ticks, finding very few on mowed trails and lawns. She also worked with the Division of Environmental Stewardship and Planning to conduct a biological water quality assessment and monitor for harmful algal blooms. Structural Geology Steward Brynn Marion began an assessment of the stream bed fractures west of the lower falls at Taughannock Falls State Park. Trail Steward Spencer King worked with Regional Trails Coordinator Zachary Ballard and his crew in the Ithaca area. Spencer learned to grade trails to prevent erosion, install water bars and other drainage projects, construct new stairs, and even helped plan a new trail at Buttermilk Falls State Park!

The FORCES Conservation Steward group often worked near Ithaca. They began the summer with the Floating

Classroom, introducing children to benthic macro-invertebrate sampling and releasing trout at Robert H. Treman State Park. During the 5th Annual Invasive Species Awareness Week (ISAW), the Conservation Stewards were joined by high school interns from The Nature Conservancy LEAF Program, as well as the FORCES Stewardship Corps in hosting an Education Fair with appropriately themed games and prizes at Buttermilk Falls State Park. FORCES also searched for invasive jumping worms at Taughannock Falls, Allan H. Treman, Robert H. Treman, and Buttermilk Falls State Parks during ISAW; the results are awaiting confirmation.

The Conservation Stewards also spent a few weeks monitoring red-backed salamanders at Taughannock Falls and Jennings Pond; the salamanders appear abundant and healthy. Seed surveys with David Rutherford of the Plant Materials Program and wildlife camera surveys also took place at Jennings Pond. Several other projects occurred at Taughannock Falls State Park as well: bird nest box monitoring using Cornell's Nestwatch framework, documenting insects using iNaturalist to assist the Empire State Native Pollinator Survey, assessing the vegetative impacts from deer (AVID), and tracking the spread of pale swallow-wort in conjunction with the FORCES Stewardship Corps.

The FORCES Conservation Stewards also travelled further within the Finger Lakes Region. They visited Sampson State Park to survey threatened twinleaf plants and to document the little known 'olive' juniper hairstreak butterfly. We missed out on the butterfly, but can happily report the twinleaf appears to be thriving. The group assisted with the research of Mariano Arias (from SUNY ESF) on ant-plant interactions at both Fillmore Glen and Robert H. Treman State Parks and learned that many wildflowers rely on ants for seed dispersal. At the end of the summer, many FORCES Stewards went to Sonnenberg Mansion and Gardens for the Growing Season Summary to share their experiences and to learn about other project work in the region. Way to go, Finger Lakes FORCES!



Conservation Steward Emma Williamson (right) is joined by The Nature Conservancy interns and other FORCES Stewards learning about the Empire State Native Pollinator Survey. Cornell bee researcher Mary Centrella (bottom left) demonstrates netting techniques. Photo credit: OPRHP

Partner Highlight: SCA Excelsior Conservation Corps

Leah Cantor, Education/Outreach Coordinator for SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps

Hello there! My name is Leah Cantor, and I am the Education/Outreach Coordinator for SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps, which takes place here in New York. Fifty members join us for their season, and become part of a “crew” in which they focus on trail/park improvements and providing environmental education to park-goers. All the work completed is on DEC (Department of Conservation) or OPRHP land and could be on the tip of Long Island, deep in the great Adirondacks, or up way up by Niagara Falls.

Our members wake up on their inch-thick sleeping pads, listening to the morning birds sing their songs. They choose to pull their dirtied up work pants over their weary bodies for their ninth day of work in a row. They hike through rain, sleep in tents through cold winds, and dig trails through the frozen ground come November. As a coordinator for this residential SCA program, I gain respect for these members while they live, breath and work outdoors for almost a year. They choose to selflessly volunteer ten months of their life to help improve the campgrounds/parks across NY State.



SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps and OPRHP staff removing non-native cattail at Ganondagan State Historic Site. Photo credit: SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps



SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps and OPRHP working with a fair-goer to construct a bluebird nest box. Photo credit: SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps

While partnering with OPRHP since Excelsior started over three years ago, our crews have been able to work alongside some of their wonderful FORCES crews. Starting with our training season, the SCA Excelsior and some FORCES members come together to receive certifications and trainings in various topics that will help them through their season as an SCA/OPRHP member. Some project highlights with FORCES include invasive/native work, and the building of birdhouse boxes at the New York State Fair!



SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps member educating volunteers on I Love My Park Day. Photo credit: SCA Excelsior AmeriCorps



FORCES

Friends of Recreation, Conservation
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Finger Lakes Environmental Field Team

Chenga Drury, Three Gorges FORCES Program Specialist, Finger Lakes Region

The Environmental Field Team (EFT) welcomed the Summer FORCES Stewards at Trainapalooza, facilitating plant ID (basic and advanced), map/compass, and iMapInvasives trainings. This summer season also consisted of training new staff, completing vegetation and wildlife surveys for multiple projects, and solidifying a seed collection protocol. For instance: Kira Broz continued mouse trapping with Chris Collins in the hickory unit at Ganondagan Historic Site to determine if prescribed burning is positively or negatively impacting small mammals. Brigitte Wierzbicki and David Rutherford completed the seed collection protocol and are now working on a protocol that would allow trained leaders to facilitate FORCES groups interested in collecting and cleaning native seeds. As the summer season ended, the EFT had their annual Growing Season Summary, this time at the beautiful Sonnenberg Gardens. A special thanks to everyone that attended or presented on that very rainy day!

Our FORCES summer project highlights include:

- Planting native plants and removing invasives for the Riparian Corridor Grant with the help from steward Charlie Ippolito at Ganondagan State Historic Site.
- Kyle Webster, Brigitte Wierzbicki, Kira Broz, Charlie Ippolito, and Whitney Carleton tabled at The Great New York State Fair displaying different types of New York ecosystems in jars.
- In the Ithaca area, the FORCES Stewardship Corps continued to map, survey, and manually remove invasives at Taughannock Falls, Robert H. Treman, and Buttermilk Falls State Parks.
- The FORCES Stewardship Corps also participated in many out-reach and education opportunities, such as tabling during New York State Invasive Species Awareness Week (NYSISAW) and hosting a public tour about the Three Gorges Project. Both of these events can be found on the weekly public access TV series; Walk In The Park by Toby Ingraham, Owl Gorge Production.



Brigitte Wierzbicki and Kyle Webster tabling at the Great New York State Fair about New York's ecosystems. Photo credit: OPRHP



FORCES Stewardship Corps member Gwen Sofka, explaining how to ID pale swallow-wort and why we care about managing this invasive species during the Three Gorges Public Tour event held on August 15th, 2018. Photo credit: OPRHP

We are saddened to see the FORCES Stewardship Corps' season end, however; we are very excited to share Carlin Wakefield's (the Stewardship Corps Lead) final report summarizing the progress of the Three Gorges Project thus far. Please contact Chenga Drury at chenga.drury@parks.ny.gov if you would like a copy.

"I am thankful for the opportunity I took to intern with the FORCES program. I was able to become more comfortable talking to the public about environmental issues and topics, as well as become more skillful at the identification of invasive species."

Bailey Park, SUNY ESF

FORCES Staff Highlight:

Tom Hughes, Stewardship Biologist, Central and Finger Lakes Regions

Wow, wow, wow. It's hard to believe that I've been at this for over ten years now, and FORCES is less than one week younger than me in its service to the agency. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities NYS Parks has provided me and the FORCES program since that fateful drive down the great NYS Thruway in late April 2008 where I conceived the FORCES idea. Now, look at how much we've grown!

Where did I start? I grew up in western NY in Rush, a small rural town south of Rochester. As a kid, I loved fish and fishing and spent most my days exploring the Finger Lakes region with my dad. I received my B.S. in Natural Resources & Fisheries from Cornell University, M.S. in Biological Sciences from SUNY Brockport, and M.P.S. in Environmental Interpretation from SUNY ESF. I've worked professionally for Cornell's Adirondack Fishery Research Program, US Fish & Wildlife Service Lower Great Lakes Fishery Resources Office, NYS DEC Region 1 Freshwater Fisheries Mngt Unit, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, SUNY ESF Thousand Islands Biological Field Station, ESF Outreach, Wells College and NYS OPRHP. I am a true New Yorker having lived all over the state! Now, I am extremely lucky to be working within all the places I played and vacationed as a kid. While many of my colleagues and Stewards refer to me as "The Grandfather" of FORCES, in many ways I still feel like that young kid growing up in the Finger Lakes Region...now growing old in the Central Region.



Yep, young me in 2008...working hard!
Photo credit: OPRHP



Older me in 2017...supervising hard! Photo credit: Joel Carlson

"This internship gave me true field experience for the first time and gave me an idea of what being a biologist truly means. It is arduous work, blood and sweat, but it is so worth it. It also gave me a taste of what it is like to perform one's own field research."

Abby Shefflin, Le Moyne College

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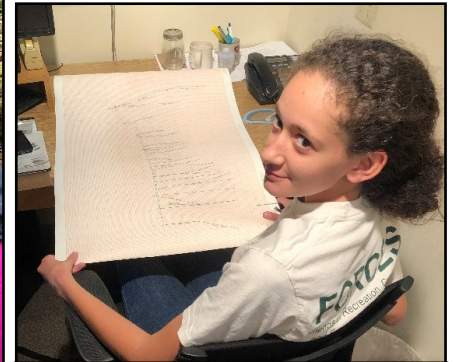
The Force Behind FORCES Picture Page



FORCES Volunteers, Excelsior Corps members, and SCA FORCES Program Specialist at the great New York State Fair.



Conservation Steward Kali Oaks finds a spotted salamander while searching for ants at R.H.Treman State Park.



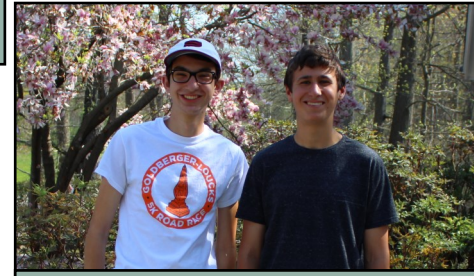
Structural Geology Steward Brynn Marion with her completed streambed fracture map of the lower falls at Taughannock Falls State Park.



Conservation Steward Stephanie Minarik removes sod to plant a pollinator garden at Long Point State Park.



FORCES Stewards Bailey Park and Danielle Moyer redistributing highbush blueberry for Chenango Valley State Park's native pollinator garden.



Rockefeller State Park Preserve FORCES Stewards Jordan Claman and Adam Ross.

Photo credits: OPRHP



FORCES Steward Alexandra Sakoulas building a trench for a water drain pipe at Glimmerglass State Park.



Environmental Health Steward Alicia Musk surveys for ticks at Fillmore Glen State Park.



Stewards Stephanie Minarik, Juliana Isnardi, and Rebecca Rolnick participating in the COAS snail surveys at Chittenango Falls State Park.



Early summer AHTF Crew at Chittenango Falls State Park. Abby Shefflin, Lily Palmer, Sean Korbas & Kelsey West.



Friends of Recreation, Conservation
and Environmental Stewardship

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FORCES Newsletter
Fall Edition 2018

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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.