



WORKING WITH A “GREEN TEAM” TO RESTORE HABITAT IN NEW JERSEY AND BEYOND

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Today, we continue our [Young N' Wild](#) series with Brittany Forslund, a Pathways Program intern at [Walkill River National Wildlife Refuge](#) about her work with students from [Groundwork Hudson Valley](#) to manage invasive species at the refuge.

I've worked at Walkill River National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey for two summers and during both, I've had the chance to work with the [Groundwork Hudson Valley](#) Green Team. The Green Team members, who come out to the refuge to help us tackle invasive species, are high school students from Yonkers, N.Y. The students are recruited from local high schools to gain work experience in the environmental field. As interns, they become familiar with working for a non-profit, gain valuable job and leadership training, develop knowledge sets, and play an integral role in all summer activities and community service projects. Much of the work done by

these teams takes place in their local community. However, Groundwork Hudson Valley also organizes field trips, including workdays at the refuge.

Last summer, we chopped and stump sprayed autumn olive in a field off of the Dogmar Dale Trail. Autumn olive grows in fields, grasslands, and wood edges and is a food source for another invasive species, starlings. It shades native vegetation, preventing them from growing and killing any plant growing close to it. This summer, we worked on eradicating ailanthus, also known as the tree of heaven, on the Liberty Loop Trail, which is also apart of the Appalachian Trail. Ailanthus grows in many disturbed upland areas. It grows in dense patches, leaving no room for natives plants to establish. It also



Green Team members removing ailanthus from the Appalachian Trail

releases herbicidal chemicals, killing its neighboring plants. For trees that were too large to cut, we girdled them, which means cutting all the way around the tree, and spraying along the cut.

The student use what they've learned about invasive plant species to clean up affected areas in Yonkers and inform residents about invasive species. While working, I get to learn more about the team and tell them about the conservation work we do in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create and maintain habitats for wildlife. Some of the team members are just looking for work experience during the summer and others enjoy working with the Groundwork Green Team and have done it throughout their high school career. I love working with this group because they have so much energy! They're focused and excited about the project, which excites and energizes me to keep working towards our conservation mission.



Me with the Green Team after a day of hard work. Although it's great to work with such an energetic group!