

Engaging Youth in Land Management

by Mary O'Malley and Blair Ripley

Sustainable land management, whether of a small private woodland or of a 700,000-acre national forest, is vital to ensuring the continued health of Kentucky's forests. When sustainable land management plans and practices are designed on a decades-long scale, nurturing the next generation of land stewards becomes just as important as nurturing the landscape.

Hands-on service-learning experiences are an invaluable way to introduce the next generation to land management and to help them build the skills and desire to continue our work. These experiences can provide specialized training, invaluable experience, and hiring pathways for future green careers. The Daniel Boone National Forest is proud to host numerous service-learning opportunities for young people through the Youth Conservation Corps and Public Lands Corps programs.

Planting the Seed

At the beginning of June, the Daniel Boone National Forest welcomed 12 young people for a summer of hard work in the woods. As part of the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), these young people will play an active role in the management of the Daniel Boone National Forest. The YCC program provides paid summer experiences for youth ages 15 to 18 to work as part of a team on fun and meaningful conservation projects on public lands while developing an ethic of environmental stewardship and civic responsibility.

During their service, YCC members will do everything from removing invasive species to assisting with research to repairing recreation facilities.

They will grow as land stewards, explore green careers, and build an appreciation and knowledge of the land that will stay with them their whole lives.

Growing Skills and Experience

Public lands such as the Daniel Boone National Forest also provide skill-building and professional development opportunities for more experienced land stewards through the Public Lands Corps (PLC) program. The Daniel Boone National Forest partners with PLC-recognized national and regional service organizations to offer meaningful, paid work experiences for adults ages 18 to 35 that advance the conservation and stewardship of public lands. Corps members contribute to important work in wildfire risk reduction, trails and recreation management, habitat restoration, research, visitor services, and more all while developing skills necessary to join the next generation of conservation leaders.

Earlier this year, PLC-recognized American Conservation Experience (ACE) crew members spent more than five weeks on the Forest gaining specialized silviculture-specific experience. Crew members carried out forest stand improvement activities to encourage regenera-





tion and recruitment of desirable species, such as white oak. They prepared sites for natural regeneration of such species and even cleared downed trees from the roads and trails leading to treatment units.

They also planted hybrid American chestnut seedlings on the Forest. These hybrids, provided by the Kentucky Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation and backcrossed for blight resistance, are the next step in developing a blight-resistant American chestnut tree capable of reclaiming its native range.

Their service overlapped with the PLC-recognized Southeast Conservation Corps (SECC) Kentucky-based Fire & Disaster Ready Crew. The six-person crew spent close to three months conducting a variety of prescribed fire work, trail repairs, developed recreation maintenance and disaster relief on the federally managed Daniel Boone National Forest and Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area as well as state and private lands impacted by natural disasters.

In addition to invaluable field experience and specialized training, crew members from both the ACE and SECC crew had the opportunity to gain Public Lands Corps non-competitive hiring authority. This two-year hiring authority makes it far easier to apply for and transition into a permanent position with the U.S. Forest Service or other federal land management agency.

Nurturing the Next Generation

As land stewards, we hope to provide for both the present and future prosperity of our forests. Engaging youth in the land management process gives us the opportunity to inspire the next generation of land stewards. Hands-on service-learning experiences on public lands, like YCC and PLC, provide invaluable opportunities for young people to develop the passion and professional skills to serve as our successors.

About the authors:

Mary O'Malley is a Public Affairs Specialist with the USDA Forest Service. She coordinates community engagement and environmental education activities for the Daniel Boone National Forest.

Daniel Boone National Forest,
1700 Bypass Rd, Winchester, KY
40391; Phone: 859-785-6753;
Email: mary.omalley@usda.gov

Blair Ripley is a Volunteer & Service Specialist with the USDA Forest Service. She coordinates the volunteer and service program for the Daniel Boone National Forest.

Daniel Boone National Forest,
1700 Bypass Rd, Winchester, KY
40391; Phone: 859-953-1729;
Email: blair.ripley@usda.gov



During their summer on the Daniel Boone National Forest, ACE crew members gained a hands-on appreciation for traditional land management tools and techniques.

Their activities (pictured above) included removing downed trees from roadways and planting hybrid American chestnut seedlings. Photos courtesy: American Conservation Experience