

Urban Youth Restoration Training

Students Learn Valuable Land Restoration Techniques

The Challenge

Protecting and improving the biological diversity of private, county, state and federal lands requires a workforce trained in restoration management techniques. Prescribed burns are an intricate part of that practice which has created the need for trained participants willing to work in challenging situations and under arduous conditions. The goal of Urban Youth Restoration Training was to train a younger urban population with the skills necessary to work in this challenging field and to encourage further training and work at either a university, college or land management agency; or possibly a career with a federal agency such as the U. S. Forest Service.

The Solution

Discussions between representatives from the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry St. Paul Field Office and the National (Midewin) branches of the Forest Service resulted in a program to train and educate a diverse crew of younger people to engage in restoration work including prescribed burn and wildland firefighting. After developing an action pilot plan, agencies were selected and appropriate members of the crew were trained with a number of restoration skills including the National Wildfire Coordinating Group standards and the Chicago Wilderness Prescription Burn training module. The Chicago Wilderness partnership enlisted the support of three not for profit groups and two Illinois county land management agencies (Lake and Cook) whose programs shared the same vision and who also wanted to increase participation of underserved communities within their programs. The intent of this initiative is to integrate similar programs and build new capability for natural resource management in the Chicago Wilderness region.



Friends of the Cook County Forest Preserve District, and Student Conservation Association trainees work on removing Cottonwood debris from the Bergman's Slough Preserve area in southern Cook County.

Resulting Benefits

Students in the Lake County Forest Preserve Youth Conservation Corps project received a wide variety of training modules including life skills, classroom, and on the job work and then put those skills to work on projects including native species planting, invasive species removal, prescribed burning, lakeshore stabilization training, collection of endangered plant data (pale vetch) and how to broadcast seed, spread mulch and mix and bag seed. The Friends of the Forest Preserve, Student Conservation and the Cook County Project which ended in November of 2007 utilized a slightly older population engaged in similar tasks. These programs are credited with greatly assisting the Cook County Forest Preserve District and have provided the students and supervisors with a wealth of restoration experience.

Sharing Success

The Forest Service has had several requests to continue this type of project in the region. Lake and Cook Counties both expressed interest in continuing a project such as this, and additional counties are interested as well. The Forest Service and Chicago Wilderness will continue to push for this type of training in the region and maintain efforts toward engaging the inner city youth in the region. In 2008 cooperators are revising and adapting a new project with recommendations and lessons learned from this pilot program for students and the environment.

A major portion of this pilot project utilized the experiential method of learning (learning by doing) which provides hands on experience to the participants as well as supervisors.



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