

Youth Volunteer Program Guide

Cultivating a Community of Forest Stewards
through Invasive Plant Workdays



2022



Produced as a collaboration between
VT Dept. Forests, Parks & Recreation
and Winooski Valley Park District



About this guide

In 2013, when we began the work that would become the VT Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation Invasive Plant program, our initial thought was to hire trail crews to treat invasive plant infestations at parks throughout the state. With so much land to protect in Vermont State Forests and State Parks, and limited resources to do the work, it became clear that we'd need many hands involved. To enact largescale change, we'd need to not only engage landowners and community champions, but also future land stewards – the young people of Vermont.

So we developed relationships with companies, organizations, learning programs, individuals, and locations, like the relationship we have with Winooski Valley Park District. Through those relationships we're able to effect profound change in many places. Many public spaces have been revitalized and thus given second chances to be places that support both human recreation and thriving habitat for plants and wildlife. At Lake Bomoseen State Park, for example, students and staff from Castleton Village School pulled invasive plants with FPR staff, and planted locally evolved dogwoods. This continued for 6 years, and students were able to see the change over time and would revisit their worksites on successive trips with their families and friends.

In our experience, a volunteer program that focuses on restoration through invasive plant removal is valuable to young people for a number of reasons. It gets them up and out of their desks, using their bodies and their brains, and actively improving their environment. It's hopeful and it's fun. It gives participants an opportunity to learn about the environment and gives them some concrete restoration actions, as it is more important than ever to protect and support local biodiversity as our global climate changes and habitats shift.

The fun and success of running restoration programs focused on invasive plant removal led us to creating this guide as a resource for anyone interested. Here, you'll find steps and checklists to get you from first thinking of a program all the way to saying goodbye to your work group, and everything in between. The appendix is full of example schedules and scripts that we have used and you're welcome to use as-is or modify to meet your needs. The guide is written from our experiences as an outside organization working with groups that support young people, but **everything here can be adapted to any kind of group, of any age.**

Our work largely involved middle school-aged volunteers, and we include guidance for running a program as well as ideas for adapting your program to fit your needs.

Finally, this is a living document. As you use this guide, please share your thoughts or additions with us, and we will incorporate them in these pages and appendices. We wish you the best of luck, and thank you for getting even more people outdoors to learn, get involved, and make a difference.

~ Elizabeth Spinney & Lina Swislocki, VT Dept. Forests, Parks & Recreation



You Can Make A Difference!

VTinvasives.org



For questions about this guide
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Latest update: April 2022