

# **Volunteer Stewardship Teams**

## **Making a difference one park at a time!**

Dedicated volunteers have enormous power to improve the ecological health of parks and the Strike Team wants to assist them! Volunteer Stewardship Teams are needed to support state, county, municipal, and non-profit conservation lands that do not have enough staff resources to meet the challenge of invasive species. The work of dedicated volunteers doesn't just impact a particular park, it generates interest and concern across their communities, motivating people to plant natives and avoid invasives in their yards and encouraging their local governments to contribute toward solutions.

Early in my career a colleague pointed me to this quote, there is no doubt that it is true, and it's exemplified by Volunteer Stewardship Teams.

**“The lesson I take from more than a decade of volunteer and professional land stewardship is that remarkable progress is the predictable result of steady, low-technology land management.”**

**- Jennifer Hillmer, Land Steward**

### **Secrets to Success in a Nutshell**

- Good communication with landowner
- Core of 1-3 group leaders and a pool of at least 10-15 available volunteers
- Predictable workdays (e.g., every other Saturday from 9am-Noon) allowing a larger volunteer pool to plug into efforts as their time allows.
  - Schedule year round with timing determined by weather
- Create and follow a concise long-term plan with annual work plans that identify digestible tasks that can be ‘checked off’ (e.g., removal of all individuals of an emerging invasive species or remove all invasives from a particularly high value area with few invasive species)
  - Successful removal always involves planning and follow up
- Include the fun stuff too! Invasive control alone is much less rewarding without some planting of native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. Successful restoration requires dealing with deer overabundance – consider deer resistant species or plant protection options.
- Lean on each other's expertise! Many groups have supported formation of other groups and regularly help each other.
- See below for additional details.

## Create a Long-term Work Plan

- Get plan approval from the landowners and keep them updated
- Mike can help groups develop plans including a training workshop and providing a concise set of recommendations that prioritize species and areas within a park.
  - We request a \$250 donation for a 2-3 hour workshop followed up with a plan, but free advice awaits anyone that reaches out to Mike by phone or email.
  - Example: [Bliss Arboretum](#)
  - Example: [Bordentown City \(multiple parks\)](#)
- Document before, during and after with photos.
- Balance planting natives and removing invasives as much as possible.

## Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

- Recruit using positive messages, talking about “habitat enhancement/integrated vegetation management” instead of solely focusing on invasive control. Utilize social media, flyers in kiosks, etc.
  - Keep in mind that highschoolers require community service hours and local corporations often seek volunteer opportunities.
  - Consider tools like SignUP Genius to make communication and scheduling easier
- Retention is enhanced with regular communications and volunteer appreciation gatherings.
- Make sure that appropriate waivers and approvals are in place based upon landowner requirements.
- Training and safety are important, utilize web resources and reinforce during workdays, especially for new volunteers.
- Clearly explain the appropriate attire for the tasks at hand, what they should bring, and what will be provided.
- Match volunteers to jobs (e.g., Scouts pull garlic mustard, High School students/corporate volunteers like to see progress and use tools).
- Explain, teach, and enroll, don’t just assign work.
- Each volunteer should stop and rest BEFORE they are physically or mentally “finished”. End each workday on schedule. Working overtime burns out volunteers.
  - Chatter and small talk are really important even if it slows the pace – this is a fun team activity, not forced labor.
- Enjoy and celebrate accomplishments!

## Tools and Supplies

- Make sure volunteers have water, safe clothing choices, safety glasses, flagging, tick spray, poison-ivy prevention (e.g., Technu), rakes, hoes, loppers, pruners, saws, garbage bags, heavy duty gloves, etc. Ideally the landowner or project leaders will provide many or most of the tools and accessories.
- Mechanical control methods require more work but with persistence can be completely effective at a small to medium scale against even the most aggressive invaders.
  - Many community teams successfully working on public properties are constrained to only use mechanical methods
  - Mechanical control methods are the only protocols that should be assigned to beginners and novices.
- Properly targeted herbicides can significantly improve progress scope and success. The use of herbicides should only be done with proper training under the supervision of landowner staff or contractors that are Certified Pesticide Applicators registered with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection.  
, The specific treatment protocol and herbicides must be supplied by the licensed supervisor along with sprayers, measuring cups, nitrile gloves, etc. The supervisor is also responsible for treatment documentation and to assure safe storage, mixing, and disposal areas.

## Resources

- **Network with other teams addressing similar challenges. We all learn from each other!**
- The [New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Team](#) provides regularly updated resources including species fact sheets, species-specific control recommendations, and an herbicide mixing table.
- The [EDDMapS phone app](#) is a great way to record observations and it contains photos and plant descriptions to help with identification – select “New Jersey” to get our customized list.
  - We strongly encourage it use! This is how the Strike Team learns about invasive distribution across the state.
- There are multiple plant identification apps to help you learn. [iNaturalist](#) includes all plants and more. You can set up a project for your park and share all of the great natural history, not just the invasives.
- [New York/New Jersey Invasive Species Strike Force resources](#)
- [Lower Hudson PRISM resources](#)
- [Uninvited: The Spread of Invasive Species video](#)
- [Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group plant management calendar](#)
- [Penn State invasive plant fact sheets](#)