



# 2023 Public Lands Partnerships Report



**Service, Learning,  
and Leadership**



# Building The Next Generation of Leaders

## Our Goals

1 Create Community Through Shared Experiences

2 Increase Confidence Through Conservation Skills

3 Build Lasting Connections To Public Lands

4 Inspire New Career Aspirations



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# Cultivating the Next Generation of Environmental Leadership

Groundwork USA is a national environmental justice nonprofit working alongside a network of grassroots affiliates—Groundwork Trusts—to create healthy, green, just, and resilient communities for all. Through our land revitalization and climate adaptation programs, we invest in the urgent and immediate changes needed in the built environment. **Through our youth leadership and workforce development programming, we invest in the future of individuals and their communities to effect change in themselves, in the built and natural environments in which they live, and in our society as a whole.**

Groundwork’s Youth Leadership and Workforce Development programs are designed to meet young people “where they are,” both figuratively and literally, to build connections between young people, their community, and the environment, increase their sense of belonging in the environmental community, and cultivate professional networks and career opportunities in the conservation, environmental, and community development fields. By integrating age-appropriate environmental education, stewardship, and leadership development across all of our programming, we:

- Foster a lifelong connection to the environment through stewardship and service-learning projects that connect conservation to everyday life.
- Increase STEAM knowledge through hands-on citizen science projects, community art installations, and public outreach.
- Build transferable life and leadership skills through community outreach and organizing, college and employee-readiness training, and community-building and mentorship.

## Types of Programs

### Green Team

Paid leadership development programs for high-school-aged youth focused on building skills needed for environmental careers.

### GroundCorps

Learn and earn workforce development programs for youth adults seeking careers in green jobs.

### Individual Placements

Paid career training placements for young adults seeking to enter careers in the National Park Service and other environmental careers.



# Expanding Horizons Through Service Learning Collaboration with the Department of the Interior

Founded through a partnership between the National Park Service and the Environmental Protection Agency, the Groundwork Network's work is interconnected with the goals of the Department of the Interior. Groundwork USA works in small-to-mid-sized cities across the country with a legacy of environmental harm that disproportionately carry the burden of extreme heat, flooding, poor air quality, and pollution. By working hand-in-hand with community members to undo the legacy of injustice and create healthy, just, and resilient communities, we restore the connection between people and land and build lasting connections to parks, trails, and public lands.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Our Shared Priorities

### Reclaim and Protect Land and Waterways

We work to transform neglected land into community assets such as parks, trails, and community gardens that protect biodiversity, increase climate resiliency, and restore access to outdoor spaces.

### Adapting to the Changing Climate

The impact of the climate crisis is not shared equally by all. To address the disproportionate harm experienced by communities of color and low-income communities, we engage youth in climate education, community outreach, and green infrastructure projects on public and private land to bring critical resilience infrastructure to their neighborhoods.

### Prepare Youth for Careers in Conservation & the Green Economy

We provide paid opportunities for age-appropriate education and workforce development training to prepare young people for careers including public lands conservation and restoration, urban forestry, and green infrastructure

\*\*\*\*\*

Our work with the Department of the Interior (DOI) creates opportunities for our youth to deepen their connection with public lands through hands-on conservation and stewardship projects that meet critical park infrastructure needs. Through these paid experiences, they gain inspiration, energy, and skills to shape their close-to-home work and contextualize it within the broader conservation movement.



# National Partnerships

Our work with the DOI creates opportunities for young people to travel outside their neighborhoods and deepen their connection with public lands through hands-on conservation and stewardship projects that meet critical park infrastructure needs. Through these experiences, they expand their sense of belonging in nature, connect with a community of peers, and explore new career opportunities. These service-learning experiences are an integral part of our youth leadership and workforce development efforts.

## National Crews

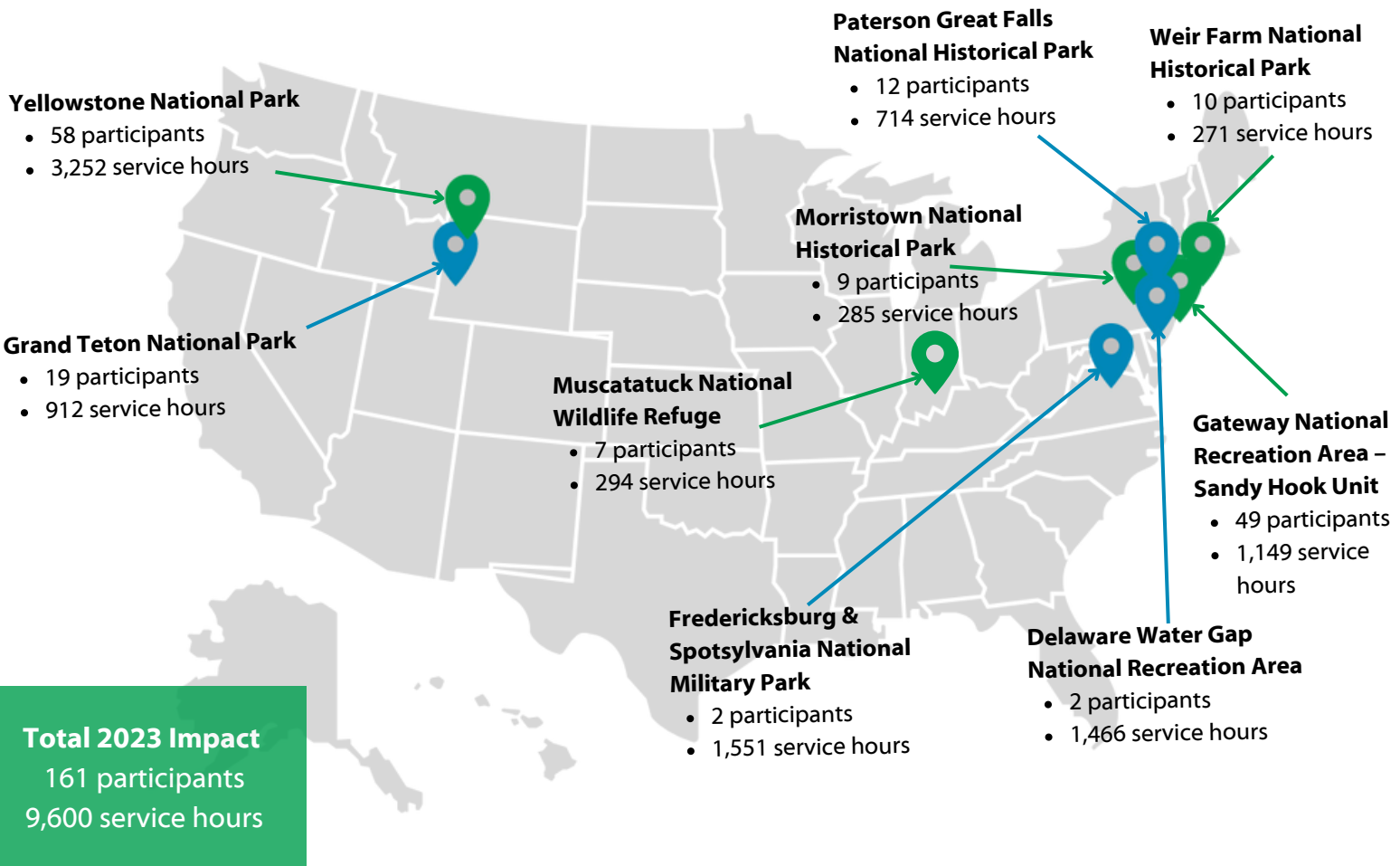
Experiential learning opportunities led by Groundwork USA that convene small crews of young people from multiple cities at one site.

## Local Crews

Local collaborations led by Groundwork Trusts provide additional recreation, conservation, or educational opportunities to existing Green Team or GroundCorps participants.

## Internships

Individualized training opportunities for young people seeking careers in the National Park Service.





# National Crew Programs

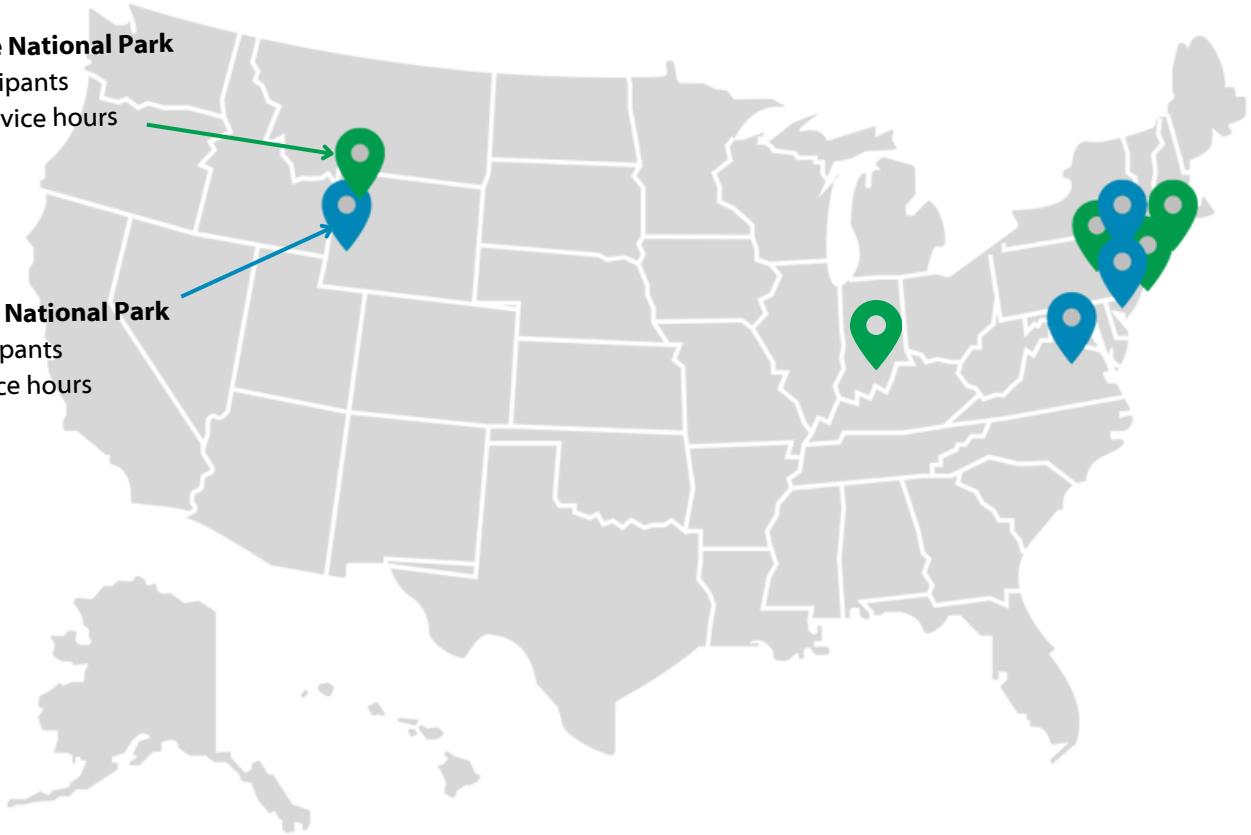
Experiential learning opportunities led by Groundwork USA that convene small crews of young people from multiple cities at one site.

## Yellowstone National Park

- 58 participants
- 3,252 service hours

## Grand Teton National Park

- 19 participants
- 912 service hours



**A special thank you to the  
Groundwork Trust leadership  
that made these programs possible!**

## Grand Teton Program Leaders

Javier Cardenas, Groundwork San Diego  
Jaleah Greene, Groundwork Buffalo  
Alexa Santisteban, Groundwork RVA  
Kendall Ford, Groundwork Jacksonville

## Yellowstone Program Leaders

Akil Kelley, Groundwork Denver  
Raphael Cartagena, Groundwork Lawrence  
Kendall Johnson, Groundwork NRG  
Bamidele Osamika, Groundwork ORV  
Erin Huber, Groundwork ORV  
Micah Johnson, Groundwork ORV  
Sarah Hashem, Groundwork Rhode Island  
Ashly Ramos, Groundwork Elizabeth  
Lily Bartlett, Groundwork Hudson Valley  
Zack Reed, Groundwork Indy  
Nate Collins, Groundwork Milwaukee  
Rosa Roncales, Groundwork RVA



# Yellowstone National Park

## THE PROGRAM

For nearly a decade, Groundwork USA has partnered with Yellowstone National Park to provide hands-on experiential learning opportunities for young people of all ages from across our network. This year, we hosted nine-day sessions in late August and early September for 12 crew leaders and 46 corps members from ten Groundwork cities – our largest crew to date! For the first time, in addition to our youth programs, we added a session exclusively for young adults (18+), with more personalized skills training and career development conversations for these young people interested in careers in conservation and construction. With more extensive training, these older crew members were able to tackle complex deferred maintenance projects.



## THE PROJECTS

This summer, our crew members learned valuable trade skills – carpentry, leveling, concreting, framing, demolition, painting, stabilization, and landscape architecture – while completing restoration and maintenance projects at the Canyon Amphitheater and the Norris Geyser Basin. In partnership with Yellowstone’s landscape architecture team, our young people addressed safety concerns in the Amphitheater by restoring the degraded benches, creating an accessible walkway, leveling seating areas, and constructing a new woodshed to store dry materials. At the Basin, we replaced 750 feet of boardwalk and installed bear boxes salvaged from the devastating 2022 flooding.



# Yellowstone National Park

## THE IMPACT

For most of our youth, this was their first visit to a National Park, their first time camping, and their longest trip away from home. In addition to work hours, participants explored the park and participated in several recreational excursions. Over 90% of participants challenged themselves to climb a mountain in the park – Mt. Washburn, Avalanche Peak, or Bunsen Peak – no small feat for young people with no hiking experience. Through our anonymous post-trip survey, 82% of participants reported that the program increased their sense of belonging in nature, 85% reported a much better understanding of the National Park Service, and 80% reported a much better understanding of the park's history, including its Indigenous history.



**"After spending the summer with the youth and realizing how important it is to create more inclusive and diverse spaces, I'm motivated to start a pilot program for Latinx and Hispanic communities in Cincinnati."**

Luis Aguilar, Director of Youth Programs, Groundwork Ohio River Valley.

More than 80% of the youth participating in our program identify as a person of color, and for many of our youth, parks and public lands are often thought of as something "for someone else." During these trips, we focus many of our activities on increasing participants' sense of belonging in nature and cultivating their identity as conservation leaders. This includes meeting with NPS staff of color, holding space to explore Indigenous history in the parks, and inviting youth to celebrate and share their identity and cultural connections to public spaces. Luis Aguilar, now a program director at Groundwork Ohio River Valley, first came to Yellowstone several years ago as a participant, and this year, he returned as a Site Coordinator. [After the summer, he shared how this experience shaped his own identity and his commitment to continuing this work back in Cincinnati.](#)





# Grand Teton National Park



## THE PROJECTS

Youth collected seeds from native plants around the park, removed invasives along the Snake River, restored historic cabins at White Grass Dude Ranch, constructed a historically accurate horseshoe pit, and repainted boundary posts at the nearby National Elk Refuge.

## THE IMPACT

Like many of our national crew members, for most participants in this program, this was their first visit to a national park. Our camping, recreation, and educational activities focus on helping youth connect with the history of the site – particularly the Indigenous history. Participants stayed in historic cabins at Murie Ranch and camped by the Gros Ventre River, learned about the local Indigenous history and career opportunities with the Parks Service from local artists and NPS staff, spent a day hiking in the Tetons, and explored Jackson Hole, WY.

## THE PROGRAM

For the past five years, we have hosted our annual Mountains to Main Street park engagement training program in partnership with Grand Teton. Through this program, we teach youth leaders about engagement and educational opportunities at national parks and provides skills-based training in youth leadership development. Building off this partnership, we hosted our first-ever national Groundwork Crew program at Grand Teton National Park in 2023. Nineteen participants from four Groundwork Trusts communities, Buffalo, NY; Jacksonville, FL; Richmond, VA; and San Diego, CA, came together in Grand Teton National Park in July 2023 for a nine-day program focused on historic preservation and vegetation stewardship.

**“Groundwork USA opens possibilities for youth to strive for greatness and teaching their youth about wildlife, work, professionalism, and teamwork.”**

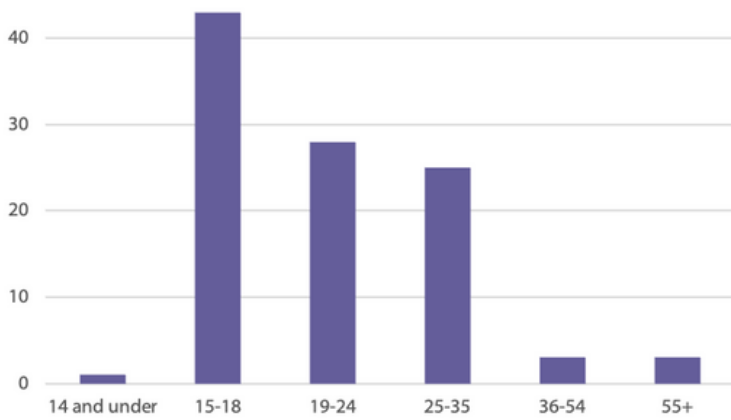
- National Youth Programs participant



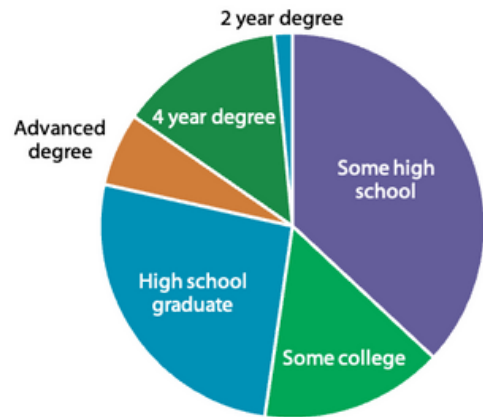
# Participant Demographics

Our program participants are overwhelmingly recruited directly from the communities where we work and are reflective of the diverse demographics of the neighborhoods where they live.

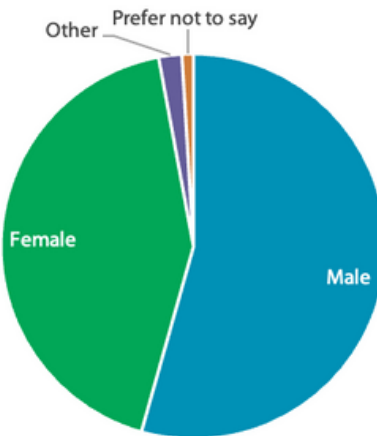
### Age



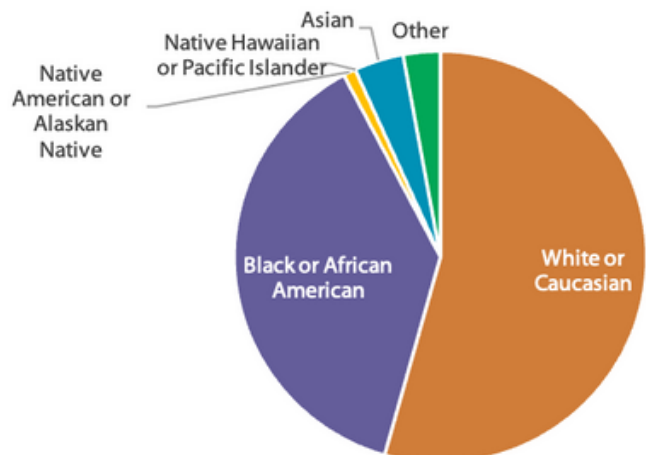
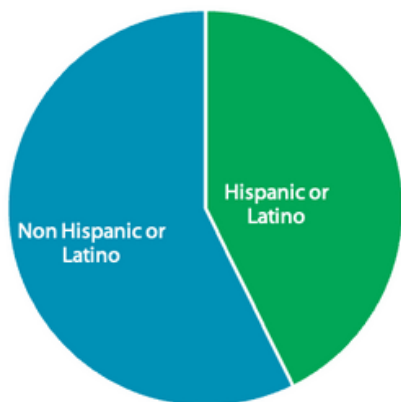
### Education



### Gender Identity



### Racial & Ethnic Identity

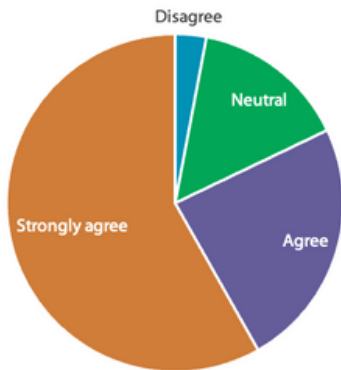




# What Our Participants Had to Say

This GroundworkUSA program has increased my sense of belonging in nature.

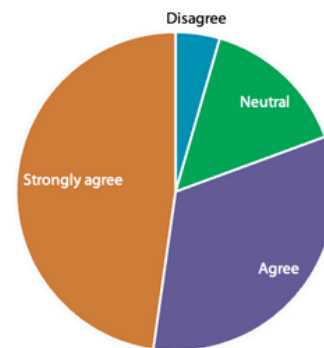
83% agreed that this program increased their sense of belonging in nature



76% of participants would be interested in doing another Groundwork program in the future

After participating in this GroundworkUSA program I have a better understanding of the history of the park, including its Indigenous history.

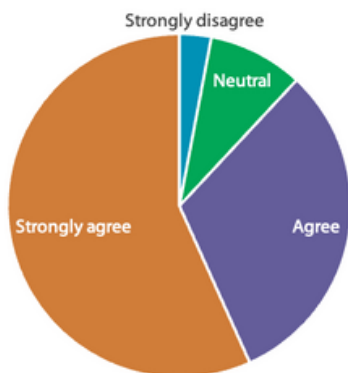
82% of participants felt supported by Groundwork USA staff before and during their experience



82% said that this program gave them a better understanding of the history of the park, including the indigenous history

After participating in this GroundworkUSA program I have a better understanding of the National Park Service.

89% agreed that participating in this Groundwork USA program gave them a better understanding of the National Park Service.



73% of participants are very likely to recommend Groundwork programs to their friends and family

# Internships

Individualized training opportunities for young people seeking careers in the National Park Service.



## TTAP Interns

Tatyana (Tea) Turner, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania  
Christopher Wilder, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania

Brianna Hungerford, Delaware Water Gap  
Jeremy Wolfgang, Delaware Water Gap



# Traditional Trades Advancement Program (TTAP)

Since 2018, Groundwork USA has partnered with the National Park Service's Historic Preservation Training Center to provide young adults with paid opportunities to learn critical conservation and restoration skills to prepare them to join the green workforce through the Traditional Trades Advancement Program (TTAP). In 2023, two Groundwork USA TTAP interns served six-month terms at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and two interns worked at Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park in Virginia. These intensive internships provide young people with extensive training in historic preservation and restoration, including timber framing, roof replacement, gutter installation, glass cutting, foundation leveling, and chimney and slate stone building restoration. As part of their experience, all TTAP interns attended the Boy Scout Jamboree in July at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in West Virginia, where they presented about careers in the historic trades and showed off their skills by participating in the restoration of a historic blacksmith's shop at Manassas National Battlefield.



## 2023 TTAP Partners

### Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area

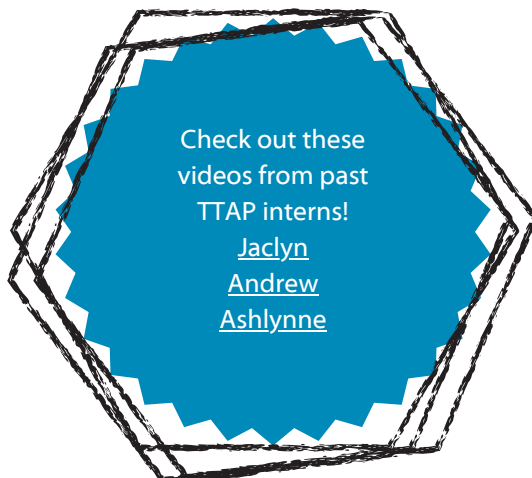
Bushkill, PA

Cody Sumski, Historic Preservationist

### Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park

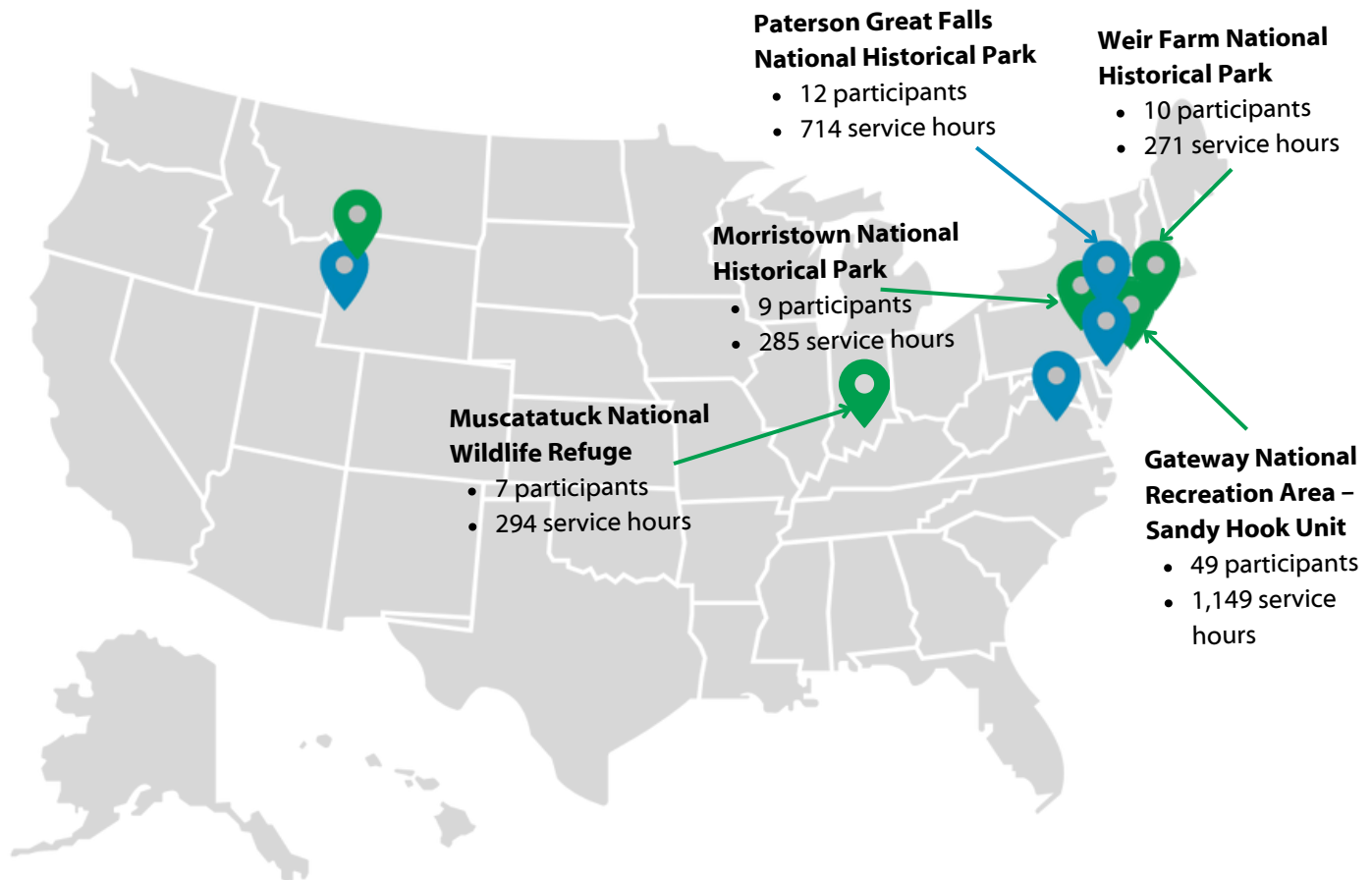
Fredericksburg, VA

John Storke, Facility Manager



# Local Crew Programs

Local collaborations led by Groundwork Trusts provide additional recreation, conservation, or educational opportunities to existing Green Team or GroundCorps participants.



**A special thank you to all the Groundwork Trust staff who coordinated these programs!**

## Groundwork Hudson Valley

Brigitte Griswold, Former Executive Director  
Ellen Theg, Chief of Operations  
Lily Bartlett, Youth Programs Manager  
Jhanelle Rahim, Youth Programs Associate

## Groundwork Bridgeport

Christina Smith, Executive Director  
Almariet Roberts, Project Manager  
Peter LeDuc, Land Steward

## Groundwork Ohio River Valley

Tanner Yess, Executive Director  
Micah Johnson, Green Corps Worksite Supervisor

## Groundwork Elizabeth

Jonathan Phillips, Executive Director  
John Evangelista, Director of Operations  
Beren Delgado, Director of Youth Initiatives



# Gateway National Recreation Area - Sandy Hook Unit

“Sandy Hook was a transformative experience for me, everything about the people we met and the work we did really gave me a sense of adaptability and understanding for the places we aren’t usually in, out of the many things I learned, the most impactful was the work ethic we were showed, and how dedicated and motivated the NPS rangers were. I won’t forget the exploring we did after work, the walks on the beach watching the sunset.”

Ashley Alvarez, Green Team Member, Groundwork Elizabeth

For young people who live in dense urban environments in the New York and New Jersey area, the opportunity to explore and work in the nearby Gateway National Recreation Area provides a new perspective on climate change than what they see in their neighborhoods. Since 2021, Green Team members from Groundwork Elizabeth (NJ) and Groundwork Hudson Valley (Yonkers, NY) have been working to restore, rebuild, and renew visitor infrastructure at Gateway National Recreation Area that has been exposed to more extreme weather in recent years. In 2023, Gateway hosted two 8-day sessions, where, in addition to trail maintenance projects, 49 urban youth corps members finished a multi-year effort to transform the historic barrack site into an active campground. Our youth corps members were the first to ever stay overnight at the new campground and had the opportunity to provide valuable feedback to the park for the public launch of the facility next summer.





# Morristown National Historical Park

**Groundwork Elizabeth's partnership with Morristown National Historical Park provides a unique opportunity for Green Teamers to learn about both the historical events and natural resources that shaped the region.** Nine Green Teamers helped prepare Morristown National Historical Park's Apple Orchard, Jockey Hollow, and Tempe Wick Gardens for the upcoming winter. The youth crew members removed invasive species from trails, mowed fields, installed tree guards and deer fencing, harvested edible and medicinal plants, and removed weeds and invasive honeysuckle. In addition to the hands-on skills they learned by working on these projects, youth also had the opportunity to learn about the historical context of these important Revolutionary War sites, such as Jockey Hollow, where George Washington's army built a winter encampment in 1779, and Fort Nonsense, a small but strong fortification built by George Washington's army.





# Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge

Through Groundwork's youth corps programs, young people can put their skills into practice in a way they can't always do in their home communities. **Six crew members and one crew leader of Groundwork Ohio River Valley's Green Corps – a workforce development program for young adults 18 to 26 years old – contributed nearly 300 hours between August and December 2023 to improving wetland conditions at Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge.** They used their experience with chainsaws to remove 22 log jams and nine beaver dams from Storm and Mutton Creeks, improving drainage and allowing debris to flow into the park's wetlands freely. Though they braved increasingly cold and wet conditions as they worked later into the fall, the crew also had the opportunity to learn about and admire the thousands of migrating sandhill cranes flying over the refuge. When they return next year, these native birds will be able to take advantage of the increased water flow in the wildlife refuge, thanks to the Green Corps' work.





# Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park

For three years now, Groundwork Elizabeth has partnered with Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park to provide their youth with an opportunity to spend time in a local national park and learn skills that will prepare them for future green economy careers. **In 2023, 12 young people from Groundwork Elizabeth contributed 714 work hours to restoration and maintenance projects at the Falls.** This included rebuilding the decking of a footbridge over the Falls and removing invasive vegetation from the Passaic River Trail with support from the Bergen County Ethical Culture Society. Through this work, the youth gained hands-on experience in construction, preservation, and safety practices, and helped make the Falls more accessible for visitors.





# Weir Farm & Coltsville National Historical Parks

Many young people in Bridgeport, CT, don't have access to sufficient green space and outdoor recreation areas. **For the second consecutive summer, Groundwork Bridgeport partnered with Weir Farm and Coltsville National Historical Parks to bring Green Team members into nearby parks to learn about public lands and complete deferred maintenance projects that keep the sites open and active.** Over the course of six weeks, the Green Team resurfaced 2,000+ feet of park trails for hikers to use and installed blacktop games to increase recreation options for visitors. With guidance from a local master artist, they produced impressionist paintings to display as part of the ongoing Art in the Park exhibit at an art show at Coltsville National Historical Park. A Green Team member took home third place and two received honorable mentions in the Teen Artist Category! This summer partnership has proven to be incredibly meaningful for Groundwork Bridgeport youth, giving them a chance to explore other areas of Connecticut and make a difference in the accessibility of their local National Parks.





# Groundwork USA

## Park Partnerships Project Funding 2023

**Gateway National  
Recreation Area**  
July - October 2023



NPF Funding \$76,056

**Grand Teton  
National Park**  
July 2023



Grand Teton NPF Funding  
\$44,971

**Morristown National Historical  
Park**  
August 2023



NPS Funding \$8,044

**Muscatatuck  
National Wildlife Refuge**  
September - November 2023



USFWS Funding \$9,520

**Paterson Great Falls  
National Historical Park**  
July 2023



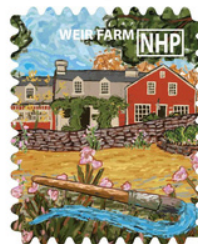
NPS Funding \$27,648

**Traditional Trade Advancement  
Program**  
April - December 2023



NPS Funding \$148,505

**Weir Farm and Coltsville  
National Historical Parks**  
July - August 2023



NPS Funding \$15,322

**Yellowstone  
National Park**  
August - September 2023



NPS Funding \$54,951  
NPF Funding \$56,461

### Total Funding

National Park Service: \$254,470

National Park Foundation: \$132,517

Grand Teton National Park Foundation: \$44,971

US Fish & Wildlife Service: \$9,520

**Total: \$441,478**



# Thank You To Our Park Partners!

Groundwork USA's Youth Programs would not be possible without the support, knowledge, and passion of many of our partners with the DOI. We'd like to give special thanks to some partners that have made our 2023 program possible and successful.

## **Washington Support Office**

Ben Baldwin, NPS Youth Programs

Floyd Myers, Former Acting Chief of the WASO Youth Program Division

Ernestine White, National Youth Employment Programs Coordinator

## **Department of the Interior**

George McDonald, Senior Advisor, Youth Programs

## **Rivers, Trails, and Conservation**

### **Assistance Program (RTCA)**

Heather Passchier, National Program Coordinator

## **National Park Foundation**

Ron Hassel, Senior Program Manager, Connecting Audiences

Rebecca Weinberg, Program Coordinator, Connecting Audiences

## **Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area**

Cody Sumski, Historic Preservationist

## **Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park**

John Storke, Facility Manager

## **Historical Preservation Training Center**

Moss Rudley, Superintendent

Claire Finn, TTAP Youth Program Specialist

## **Gateway National Recreation Area**

Pete McCarthy, Former Unit Manager, Sandy Hook

Minka Sendich, Deputy Superintendent

Gage Biongirovi, Park Ranger, Sandy Hook Unit

## **Grand Teton National Park**

Megan Kohli, Director of Youth, Community, and Volunteer Engagement

Julie Gonzalez, Community Engagement Coordinator

Asnoldo Benitez, Teton Science Schools Faculty

## **Morristown National Historical Park**

Robert Masson, Superintendent

## **Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge**

Alejandro Galvan, Refuge Manager

## **Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park**

Darren Boch, Superintendent

## **Yellowstone National Park**

Bob Fuhrmann, Youth Education & Work Program Manager

Mike Coonan, Youth Work Program Coordinator