

National Elk Refuge News

Urban Youth Program Included Refuge Work Project



Part of the Groundwork USA team poses in front of old fence posts that were removed from the Refuge along with strands of barbed wire.

The 2015 summer field season is winding down for Groundwork USA's Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, and as organizers reflect on the successes this year, a visit and work project at the National Elk Refuge rises to the top of the list.

Eleven youths, aged 16–23, spent a day on the Refuge in late July to learn about the National Wildlife Refuge System, be introduced to concepts of range management and conservation, and help remove a barbed wire fence from a portion of the Federal property.

Though the work project lasted only a day, it was part of a growing partnership between the

organization and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to engage youth in conservation and restoration projects outside of their home areas. Groundwork USA involves young people in training programs designed to address the environmental challenges facing their local communities. The majority of Groundwork USA's youth program participants are diverse individuals from poor neighborhoods in economically disadvantaged urban communities.

Though the primary focus of Groundwork USA's work is in urban areas, creating short term restoration projects in places outside of a city setting helps the youths see a connection between the work they do at home and

broader conservation efforts across the country. "It gives them some context for their work," explained Curt Collier, the organization's National Youth Program Director. "It shows them they're part of much larger efforts elsewhere." Collier also noted the participants develop an appreciation for a place more if they have an opportunity to work at a site rather than just visit.

The group that came to the National Elk Refuge was comprised of team members from New Orleans, Dallas, and Denver. With four work days already scheduled in Grand Teton National Park to work on trail projects, Collier reached out to the National Elk Refuge to include the

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the group's Wyoming experience. "The more diverse the experiences we can offer to our youth groups, and the more Federal agencies we can partner with, the more of a learning opportunity it creates," he explained.

For many in the group, the trip to Wyoming was the first time in an airplane and the first chance to be in a mountain setting. "They were very inspired by the open landscape and stunning views," Collier said. "They were also fascinated by the introductory presentation from the Refuge staff on range management. It really captured their attention."

Dele Johnson, a youth leader for the program, wrote about his experience at the National Elk Refuge this summer. His article was posted this week on the Groundwork USA's web site and noted the experience left a lasting impact on all of them. Read Johnson's recently published Groundwork profile at <http://bit.ly/1jaU5pN>.



*Above:
Groundwork USA's work project
took place on a remote parcel
of Refuge land located
on East Gros Ventre Butte.*

*Below:
Though the crew was scheduled to
remove only a portion of a barbed
wire fence, the ambitious team
completed the entire project
in just a few hours.*

