

Down and dirty helping land trusts

AmeriCorps workers jump in on projects

By Lynn Mellis Worthington, RepublicanAmerican

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AmeriCorps team leader Joe Sewall, left, works with Jeremiah Thomas on creating cages to protect native plants during a work session Monday at Marvelwood School in Kent. The group assisted the Kent Land Trust with conservation projects. Lynn Mellis Worthington Republican-American.

Kimora Felton, left, and Kaeligh Watson create field guides for bird identification.



AmeriCorps team member Jeremiah Thomas creates cages to protect native plants with Kent Land Trust board member Laurie Doss during a work session Monday at Marvelwood School in Kent. The group assisted the land trust with conservation projects. Lynn Mellis Worthington Republican-American

AmeriCorps team member Jeremiah Thomas screws together a cage to protect native plants with Kent Land Trust board member Laurie Doss during a work session Monday at Marvelwood School in Kent. The group assisted the land trust with conservation projects. Lynn Mellis Worthington Republican-American



KENT— Seven local land trusts are getting a helping hand on a number of environmental projects from a team of AmeriCorps workers for the next couple of weeks.

The series of projects are being coordinated by the Housatonic Valley Association and Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative. Greenprint manager Connie Manes said it is the first time her organization has worked with AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps.

“Our project proposal had seven weeks of projects involving 11 land trusts,” Manes said. “We were awarded a team for two-and-a-half weeks in early March. That required a little bit of adjustment and coordination. We had to figure out which projects would be most able, most shovel-ready to go through. We ended up with five land trusts that were given two days each for their projects.”

The land trusts involved are: Kent Land Trust, Weantinog Heritage Land Trust, Sharon Land Trust, Cornwall Conservation Trust, Naromi Land Trust, New Hartford Land Trust and the Steep Rock Association.

The team arrived March 9 and began its work on Friday. They started working for the Steep Rock Association in Washington by creating owl nesting boxes and outhouses for the summer campsites.

The weather has been interfering with the plans. Friday’s snowstorm meant a planned training session at the Trinity Conference Center in Cornwall was canceled and that project won’t be completed.

On Monday evening, the group moved to Marvelwood School in Kent as a precautionary measure for Tuesday’s blizzard because they had been staying in a private home and could have lost power during the storm.

On Monday and Tuesday, the group completed several projects for the Kent Land Trust that will benefit the Macedonia Forest Block Important Bird Area, which was designated by Audubon Connecticut. Working in pairs, the AmeriCorps crew finished habitat restoration projects that will be installed at the Skiff Mountain South preserve.

Laurie Doss, a board member on the land trust, helped coordinate and guide their efforts. Joe Sewall and Jeremiah Thomas created cages that eventually will be placed around native plants to protect them from deer. Kenzie Leach, Alyssa Shoup and Nathan Devey worked on purple martin nest boxes, part of an ongoing project to establish and maintain inland colonies of the birds.

Another bird-related project was the creation of field guides by Kaeligh Watson and Kimora Felton.

Rayguon Hall and Jaylandt Gilmer, meanwhile, created supports for three wood duck boxes that will be installed in the preserve.

Felton and Leach are the team’s media liaisons, sharing photographs and information about the team’s projects on social media.

Felton, of South Carolina, said she got involved with AmeriCorps for several reasons, including travel and adding skills to her resume, but she also is looking forward to furthering her education with a \$6,000 college grant.

“I got my GED two years ago when I was 16, so I already went to college and got my veterinary tech certification,” Felton said. “I’d like to go to another college and become a forensic psychologist.”

Leach said she was taking a year off from college and has one more year to go.

“My main goal is to work for the National Park Service, so I thought this would be very beneficial – building trails and stuff,” Leach said.

Sewall, who is from Newport, Ore., is the team’s leader. He previously served in the AmeriCorps Vista program, which matched him up with an organization focused on poverty for an entire year.

“I felt like I had a lot of good fortune in my life and I wanted to pay it forward,” Sewall said.

“I wanted to get my hands dirty, so I thought I’d try AmeriCorps NCCC.”

His parents were both environmental scientists, so he enjoyed the projects that helped improve the environment.

The team will be working on a wide range of projects during their year. When they leave Northwest Connecticut, they’ll head to Schoharie, N.Y., for a month to work on flood recovery projects, Sewall said.

Manes said she’s looking forward to working with additional AmeriCorps groups to continue tackling environmental and conservation projects.

“Among the collaborative’s 24 organizations, there are many more projects that we hope to complete with future AmeriCorps NCCC volunteers or through a summer internship program currently under development,” she said.