




Youth and Adult Volunteer Stewardship Opportunities in the South Mountain Reservation

October, 2020





The Conservancy’s stewardship programs are about getting outside and making a difference! Our South Mountain Reservation is a beautiful natural environment right in our backyard. Unfortunately, it needs much tender love and care due to the unnatural and natural stresses placed on it by increasing use and the changing environment. Add to the fact that over the past three decades, budgetary constraints have significantly reduced County maintenance efforts, it needs our help. That is where the SMC and its many volunteers step in.

Working independently or in groups, our programs can serve as excellent opportunities for adults, teens and youths seeking to fulfill their required community service hours. Our activities have provided a focus for community service projects for groups ranging from the scouts and high school environmental clubs, to religious organizations, corporations and alumni associations. The goal is to give back to the community and help the local environment while forging strong personal and organizational bonds.


Below are the various volunteer stewardship opportunities available through the Conservancy. To learn more, contact the program coordinators using the emails noted, or visit our website www.somocon.org (where you can also sign up for our monthly e-Bulletin).

<p>Trail Work Crew</p> 	<p>These volunteers meet monthly, generally the first Sunday of the month, 9:00 a.m. to noon, from April through December, to construct new and restore trails in the Reservation as part of our Sustainable Trails Initiative. The locations for these programs can change month to month. For further information, contact program coordinators John Verzani and Dennis Percher at trailwork@somocon.org, or go to https://www.somocon.org/trail-work-crew/.</p>
<p>Forest Regeneration Corps</p> 	<p>The primary stewardship opportunities of this group are to help maintain and enhance the fauna and infrastructure of the 14-acre Wildflower and Forest Preserve located off Crest Drive. In addition, community groups can also work to help maintain some of the other, smaller 41 forest regeneration sites scattered throughout the reservation as part of our “adopt-a-regen-site” program. In all these activities, you would be helping in forest restoration by planting native species and removing invasive plant species. For further information, contact program coordinators Christy Zolty and Glenn Newman at forestregen@somocon.org, or go to https://www.somocon.org/forest-regeneration/.</p>
<p>Forest Regeneration Fencing Team</p> 	<p>In 2008, a twenty-year project proposed by SMC and funded by the County and NJ Green Acres created 42 forest regeneration sites throughout the Reservation, exclosures protected from deer. While the County repairs the fencing around the 14-acre Wildflower and Forest Preserve, it has fallen to the SMC and its “Fencing Team” to repair the perimeters at the other 41 regeneration sites that are damaged by toppled trees, especially after large storms. For further information, contact program coordinators Dennis Percher and Dave Berry at fencingteam@somocon.org, or go to https://www.somocon.org/forest-regeneration/.</p>

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<p>Trailkeepers</p> 	<p>This group of over 20 volunteers work independently to monitor and provide basic maintenance on over 30 miles of blazed trails and woods roads. Each volunteer reports to the Trailkeeper program coordinator once a season on the condition of their assigned trail segment and its blazing. Their trail reports address the trail tread and corridor, blazes, and other conditions needing attention (e.g., severe erosion, trash accumulation and potentially unsafe conditions like leaning or dead trees close to the trail). For further information, contact trailkeepers@somocon.org, or go to https://www.somocon.org/trailkeepers/.</p>
<p>Chainsaw Gang</p> 	<p>This group of adults removes fallen trees from the 50 miles of trails and that fall on the fencing at regeneration sites in the SMR. These are identified by Trailkeepers or any of the SMC's program coordinators. Volunteers can be serve as sawyers with their own saws, or draggers who remove the cut limbs from the trail. This is done both individually and through scheduled SMR activities based on identified needs. For further information, contact program coordinators Jack Vayda and Dave Berry at chainsawgang@somocon.org, or go to https://www.somocon.org/chain-saw-gang/.</p>
<p>Trash Tacklers</p> 	<p>Our trails in the SMR are being used more than ever. Unfortunately, with the increase in use, we're seeing a lot more trash. The Trash Tacklers help by removing trash and litter from hiking trails, picnic/parking areas, and other Reservation locations that are used for illegal dumping. This can be done individually on one's own schedule, or as a group.</p> <p>In 2020, we introduced <i>PLOGGING</i> events, a Swedish-coined activity for jogging or walking and plucking up trash. Given the pandemic, the individual or small group activity is done independently (sometimes on scheduled weekends). The results are documented on our Facebook site by photos of the filled trash bags making it a <i>virtual plogging</i> activity. For more information, visit our website for upcoming events, www.somocon.org, contact program coordinator Dave Berry at trashtacklers@somocon.org, or go to https://www.somocon.org/trash-tacklers/.</p>
<p>Citizen Science</p> 	<p>Citizen Science is the practice of public participation and collaboration in research to increase scientific knowledge. Through citizen science, people share and contribute to data monitoring and collection programs [NationalGeographic.org]. South Mountain Reservation, with its river, vernal ponds, woodlands and many species of birds and other animal life, has a variety of opportunities for the citizen scientists. By offering citizen science programs, the Conservancy is better able to understand the biotic relationships within the Reservation. This helps us advocate for responsible conservation and land management strategies and partner with local scientists.</p> <p>FrogWatch USA: Ages 12+. Ranges from independent to small group work. Successful completion of free training course is required. SMC partners with Cora Hartshorn Arboretum and Bird Sanctuary. We monitor throughout the breeding season (late Feb-August).</p> <p>eBird: 12+. Must have existing knowledge of bird identification. This program is completely independent. If you are already an eBirder or would like to be, please contact SMC Operations Director. In this case, the coordinator may check in from time to time about species observed and frequency.</p>

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	<p>NestWatch: This program is under development and will be coming soon!</p> <p>For further information, contact program coordinator and SMC Operations Director, Lori LaBorde at citizenscience@somocon.org, or go to https://www.somocon.org/citizen-science/ .</p>
<p>Scout Projects</p> 	<p>Scouts have been an integral part of improving the SMR improvements over many years. Generally, they are tied to the objectives of the several SMC programs described above, along with the implementation of a signage system developed by the SMC. These projects are planned with and overseen by the Conservancy who obtains County permission, as necessary. Examples of projects undertaken in pursuit of Eagle Scout and Girl Scout Gold and Silver Awards are: the constructing a pergola at the Preserve; repairing fencing at regeneration sites; building bog and stream bridges; constructing and repairing benches; and installing parts of the signage system; installing bird houses; and constructing insect habitats and traps.</p> <p>If you are interested in working with the SMC on a project, contact Dennis Percher and Dave Berry at projects@somocon.org. There is also additional information at https://www.somocon.org/projects/ .</p>

Volunteer Age Requirements

Ages	SMR Group Activity	Independent/Community Group Activity
12 and above	Forest Regeneration*+	Adopt-a-Regeneration- Site program*+
	Citizen Science*+	Citizen Science*+
15 and above	Trash Tacklers/Plogging*	Trash Tacklers/Plogging*
	Trail Work*	
		Scout Projects*
Adult	Chainsaw Gang	Chainsaw Gang
	Forest Regen – Fencing Team	
	+ Adult supervision is required for children below age 15 * Parental permission and waiver required below 18	