

Trail Maintenance

My internship with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) involved stewardship of the preserve. One important aspect of my internship at TNC was trail maintenance. Visitors enjoy the trails and it's important that they're taken care of so that they remain accessible to all.

My Trail Maintenance Responsibilities

- Raking and/or leaf-blowing
- Upkeep with trash cans
- Upkeep with preserve signs
- Setting up and retrieving the trail counters

Being out in nature and enjoying it is one of the reasons people end up caring about nature and acting to protect it. All of the listed responsibilities above were important. Working with the trail counters was an especially interesting job to me because I learned that they record how many people come to the trails, which is a dataset that is crucial for funding.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Aaron McCaul and Lora Eddy for being such great mentors! I learned a lot during my time at TNC and it was a great environment to work in.

Butterfly Garden

I also worked on preserving and enhancing the butterfly garden while I was there. In addition to having aesthetic value, butterflies are important pollinators and so are helpful for the ecosystems within the preserve. I mainly worked on making sure the plants they rely upon were available and healthy, so the butterflies had what they needed to thrive.

My Butterfly Garden Responsibilities

- ❖ Weeding out the invasive species present in the butterfly gardens (for ex. pine tree sprouts)
- ❖ Planting new species that butterflies rely upon (for ex. milkweed)
- ❖ Harvesting milkweed seeds



Me leaf-blowing the trails, October.



Abigail and I weeding the butterfly garden

Invasive Species

Another part of my job at TNC focused on invasive plant species removal. The trails have invasive species because the seeds come in on trucks carrying equipment (wood, fertilizer, plants, etc.). They need to be removed because otherwise they outcompete the native plants, wrecking havoc on the ecosystem.

My Invasive Species Removal Responsibilities

- Flagging where they are located
- Applying herbicide to the identified species
- Weeding when herbicide isn't an option (for ex. when it is raining)

Working on the invasive species removal, I definitely got a close up view of how tenacious they are. One of the invasive species that I worked a lot on was microstegium, which has been in the US since 1919. Getting rid of invasive species is hard, never ending work, but it is necessary for the preserve's health.



Microstegium