Dear Friends and Supporters,

I’m back from maternity leave but never really left. I brought baby Mason to meet our students in the park throughout the summer and stayed in touch with Stacey who ran the program for me. In case you didn’t know, Stacey was one of our high school students just three summers ago. She is an amazing, mature young woman who took our leadership training so seriously (and with good humor!) that the program ran perfectly these last few months. The summer session which just wrapped up increased our numbers by 86% because partnering with Friends of Van Cortlandt Park, which the Pinkerton Foundation made possible, allowed us to serve even more students in the job training aspect of our program.

In this newsletter I especially want to share with you the critical new data the students gathered for management of the park’s natural resources. Second- and third-year participants collected GPS information to add to the park’s GIS data base which furthered their environmental awareness through technology. These teens presented their latest projects to Van Cortlandt Park Administrator Margot Perron, Con Edison Manager Evelyn Oliver, professors from Lehman and LaGuardia Colleges and their fellow students. Throughout the summer, they had collected data for three projects and entered it into the GIS data base to help guide the management of VCP’s natural resources under the guidance of NYC Parks’s restoration and GIS specialist, Forester Alex Smith. These three projects bring critical data that otherwise would not have been collected.

1. WAYFINDING
The students responded to the park’s two year master planning process by assisting in the mapping of trails and placement of trail signage, a concern heard often during master plan community meetings. As in all parks, visitors want to know where they are, what to visit, and how to get there. Second-year and third-year GIS students Ian Kenyon and Walker Stevens worked with NYC Parks Trails Crew Chief Bradley Pazian to map the trail intersections in the Northwest Woods, then created prototypes for signs for 5-Boro Shops to create and be installed by Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy’s Cross Country Trail during the year.

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2. CANOPY GAP STUDY
Ian and Walker also presented an important canopy gap study. The past few years’ intense storms have created over 300 large canopy gaps in the park’s 553 Forever Wild acreage. These gaps, flooded with sunlight, quickly became invaded by vines. The students assisted in GPS data collection from the gaps that will be used to create a high priority management strategy before the invasives become entrenched.

3. TREE INVENTORY
First-year GIS students Sandra Cruz and David Crespo presented their work identifying, measuring and mapping all the street trees and landscape trees in the park. These particular trees experience not only storm stress but also stresses from cramped, compacted roots, sweltering sun, ozone particulate matter, and winter salt for de-icing sidewalks. Data from this inventory will be useful in future planning to determine which trees are more resilient, and give future managers more information for landscape planning.

When they are not collecting data or studying in Lehman lecture halls, Green Jobs for Youth participants are apprenticing with our horticulturists, trail builders, and forest restoration specialists. Together we are cultivating green careers and awareness for young people to be the next generation in our own positions.

I’ll send you another newsletter in the fall to let you know what our students are up to in the park year round. Until then, be well and know that 40 Bronx public school students appreciate your support in their growth.

Best regards,

Paulina Mohamed, Director of Youth & Volunteer Programs

P.S. Enjoy this article about our students from the Riverdale Press! (The reporter just got one word wrong -- the students are paid for their work, they are not volunteering.)