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## Youth Conservation Team Removes More Than 50,000 Sq. Ft. of Invasive Plants in Northern Kentucky

Contributed By: [Rich Cogen](#) | Ohio River Foundation

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For three weeks this summer, the Ohio River Foundation hired five high school and college students to work at Northern Kentucky University wetland and stream mitigation sites. Their primary target was removing the invasive Amur Honeysuckle plant (*Lonicera maackii*), Callery Pear (*Pyrus calleryna*), Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*), and Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*). Removing these invasive species from the landscape is important because they displace native plant species by using all essential resources the native plants need to survive.

Three of the four sites the crew worked at are restoration projects and were due for a 3-5 year 'checkup'. The students did a sweep of the project sites at Florence World of Golf, Bentwood Hills Condominiums, and Parkside Preserve, removing any invasive plants that had re-sprouted. An important part of any invasive removal project is to make the initial work sustainable. Unless adjacent properties have also removed their invasive plants, seeds from surrounding areas will continue to encroach on the restored area. For this reason, the removal of invasives by adjacent property owners also plays an important role in project success.

The fourth site was at the St. Anne Wetland site in Melbourne, KY. "This is an important regional site because it is one of the last remaining forested wetlands in Northern Kentucky" says restoration ecologist Jacob Bartley. Honeysuckle is so dominant in parts of this 51-acre site that its root structure prevents the wetlands from staying wet, creating an ineffective wetland presence. Honeysuckle removal will allow the wetland to naturally expand and properly function.

These students were hired not only as laborers, but to learn and to broaden their view of what career opportunities are available in the environmental sciences. Trystin Blanchet, a junior at Holy Cross High School, is undecided what career path she may be interested in. Trystin says that she has "... always liked the environment...and thought this would be a good opportunity to figure out what [she] want[s] to do."



The 2016 Youth Conservation Team crew surrounded by honeysuckle they cut down. Left to right: Charlie DeVoe, Trystin Blanchet, Courtney Roush, Sarah Ruehl, Lexi Gauger.

For example, one day each week, the students traveled to various college field stations to meet and work with professionals and professors. Not only did they gain hands-on experience with environmental equipment and techniques, but they gained valuable networking opportunities.

Sarah Ruehl, a recent graduate of East Central High School, plans to attend the University of Indianapolis, majoring in Environmental Sustainability with a minor in Environmental Science. She says she "...gained a lot of good connections," and that this job "...gave (her) an idea as to what is out there career-wise, and gave (her) some real world experience."

These students had a very productive and rewarding summer, removing over 53,000 square feet of invasive plants from four different mitigation sites, visiting three local college field stations, and having a meaningful impact on their community and their environment.

If you, or someone you know, may be interested in this paid experience next summer, visit [www.ohioriverfdn.org](http://www.ohioriverfdn.org) for applications and more information.

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