



Groundwork Profiles

Dele Johnson

Groundwork USA has developed a strong partnership with the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and their Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, which aims to provide opportunities for urban residents to find, appreciate, and care for nature in their own communities—goals that align closely with the work that Groundwork Trusts are doing in urban communities across the country every day.

Constructing a sustainable future, for Groundwork, is about the intentional integration of both the natural and the urban realms—to bring about understanding, collaboration, and tangible change through that process. The multi-layered partnership between the Groundwork USA network and US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) embodies just this integration.

Between Groundwork Hudson Valley’s environmental restoration work at Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge and Groundwork Denver’s five-year partnership with Rocky Mountain Arsenal, links between Groundwork Trusts and the USFWS have brought a lot of awareness and green space into Groundwork’s urban communities—and vice versa. This summer, nine Groundwork youth, along with three Youth Leaders—one of whom was Dele Johnson of Groundwork Denver—went to National Elk Refuge to work, learn and play, as part of Groundwork USA’s growing partnership with USFWS.

“Both Groundwork and USFWS are trying to engage people in benefitting from and helping preserve and conserve public land,” Johnson, the Volunteer and Communications Coordinator at Groundwork Denver, says. “It’s not just one person’s effort. It’s the community’s effort. Everyone should be

“BOTH GROUNDWORK AND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ARE TRYING TO ENGAGE PEOPLE IN BENEFITTING FROM AND HELPING TO PRESERVE AND CONSERVE PUBLIC LAND. IT’S NOT JUST ONE PERSON’S EFFORT—IT’S THE COMMUNITY’S EFFORT.”

taking a stake.” Through the USFWS, the concept of changing lives through changing places stretches to include the nationwide community.

“We are working with our youth to focus on the local,” Johnson continues. “But then we get these great opportunities because of the federal partnerships to let the youth see changes on a larger scale.”

Ties with Groundwork Denver and the USFWS’s National Refuge System run deep. Denver has had an ongoing relationship with Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Refuge, a 15,000-acre urban refuge outside the Denver city limits, for five years now.

This summer, 14 youth from the Green Corps—Denver’s labor-intensive, college-age employment program—worked at the Arsenal. The Corps cleared over 500 acres of invasive species and helped to improve over 4,000 linear feet of riparian habitat. The year before, 11 Green Corps members planted cottonwood tree plantings, removed prairie

dog barriers, assembled irrigation pipe lines, and collected native seeds to spread.

This summer, Natalie Fath, Visitor Center Manager and Volunteer Coordinator with National Elk Refuge, collaborated with Groundwork USA on an opportunity for Groundwork youth to work at the Refuge. Johnson (pictured above there this summer) worked with nine Groundwork youth—four from Dallas, three from Denver, and two from New Orleans—to remove a barbed wire fence. “It’s a dangerous barrier to the elk who are in the Greater Yellowstone area migrating to the elk refuge,” Johnson explains. Removing the fence, according to Johnson, eases the elk’s journey.

The work typically shifts the Green Corps members’ views on career prospects and environmental stewardship. “I’ve definitely seen, over the years, young people who’ve been working with Groundwork really become passionate about helping improve the environment,” Johnson says. “Learning about these different career opportunities and the work that goes in to making sure these places stick around with us for a long time leaves a huge impact.”

DEDICATED TO CHANGING PLACES AND CHANGING LIVES, GROUNDWORK USA, DEVELOPED WITH NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SUPPORT, IS A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION WITH LOCAL ROOTS, WORKING TO REVITALIZE NEIGHBORHOODS AND TRANSFORM COMMUNITY LIABILITIES INTO ASSETS.

