

The Green Team and the Restoration of Plaster Creek

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Introduction

Many urban youth do not spend extended time outdoors learning about nature. Natural places can easily become foreign and even scary to these young people.

The Green Team is a group of high school students from the Plaster Creek Watershed that works to learn about and restore Plaster Creek. The students are led by work by middle school science teacher Gary Warners, as well as two college students (Deanna Geelhoed and Micah Warners). Together learned about watershed ecology, planted rain gardens, collected seeds, removed invasive plants, grew seedlings for future plantings, and had lots of fun together.

Summer 2015 was the third year of having two sessions of the Plaster Creek Stewards Green Team, with five students in both June and July. This year a second Green Team was initiated in the Rogue River Watershed as well. These high school students come from many different backgrounds, but all worked together with the common goal of restoring a damaged waterways.



The Plaster Creek and Rogue River Green Teams planting native plants to protect the stream bank of Cedar Creek.

Our Work



Green Team participants after a wet day of watershed restoration along Cedar Creek in Cedar Springs.

As college students, we worked with the Green Team students to help guide them in a variety of ways. While we were leaders, we also worked alongside the high school students and were able to get to know them quite well. We learned a lot about their lives and shared from ours as well. We also encouraged them in their future college plans and hopefully helped to de-mystify college for them and made it more likely they would attend college in the future. In the work that we did with the students, we were able to teach, motivate, explain, and have lots of fun together.



Green team members working at a rain garden in Alger Heights

Projects

Alger Heights Rain Gardens

The Green Team installed seven curb-cut rain gardens in Alger Heights, a neighborhood that will receive twenty of these residential gardens over two years. Curb-cut rain gardens capture storm water by diverting it from streets into the dug out tree lawn through a curb-cut, or a break in the curb.

Research Shadow Day

One morning of each session the Green Team students shadowed Calvin research students in a wide variety of exciting projects.



Green Team student shadowing E.coli research project with Calvin College research students.

Cedar Creek Stream Bank

Green Team members worked to reinforce the banks of Cedar Creek, a tributary to the Rogue River, by planting native plants on the creek's banks that will decrease erosion and reduce runoff.

CRC Denominational Building

The Green Team worked to maintain native gardens at the CRC Denominational Headquarters. We weeded, planted more plants, and watered native trees. These plants and trees are great for native wildlife such as insects, birds and butterflies.

Kreiser Pond

This work involved maintenance and plant additions to a large restoration project at a detention pond intended to slow down Silver Creek, a tributary of Plaster Creek.

Native Plant Propagation

We collected seeds of native plants, grew them up in the greenhouse, and transplanted them so they can be used in future restoration projects.

Conclusions

Green Team Feedback:

"I wish I could do this all summer," said June Green Team member Jason.

"I never would have thought about water this way before I started," said Elizabeth, a July Green Team member.

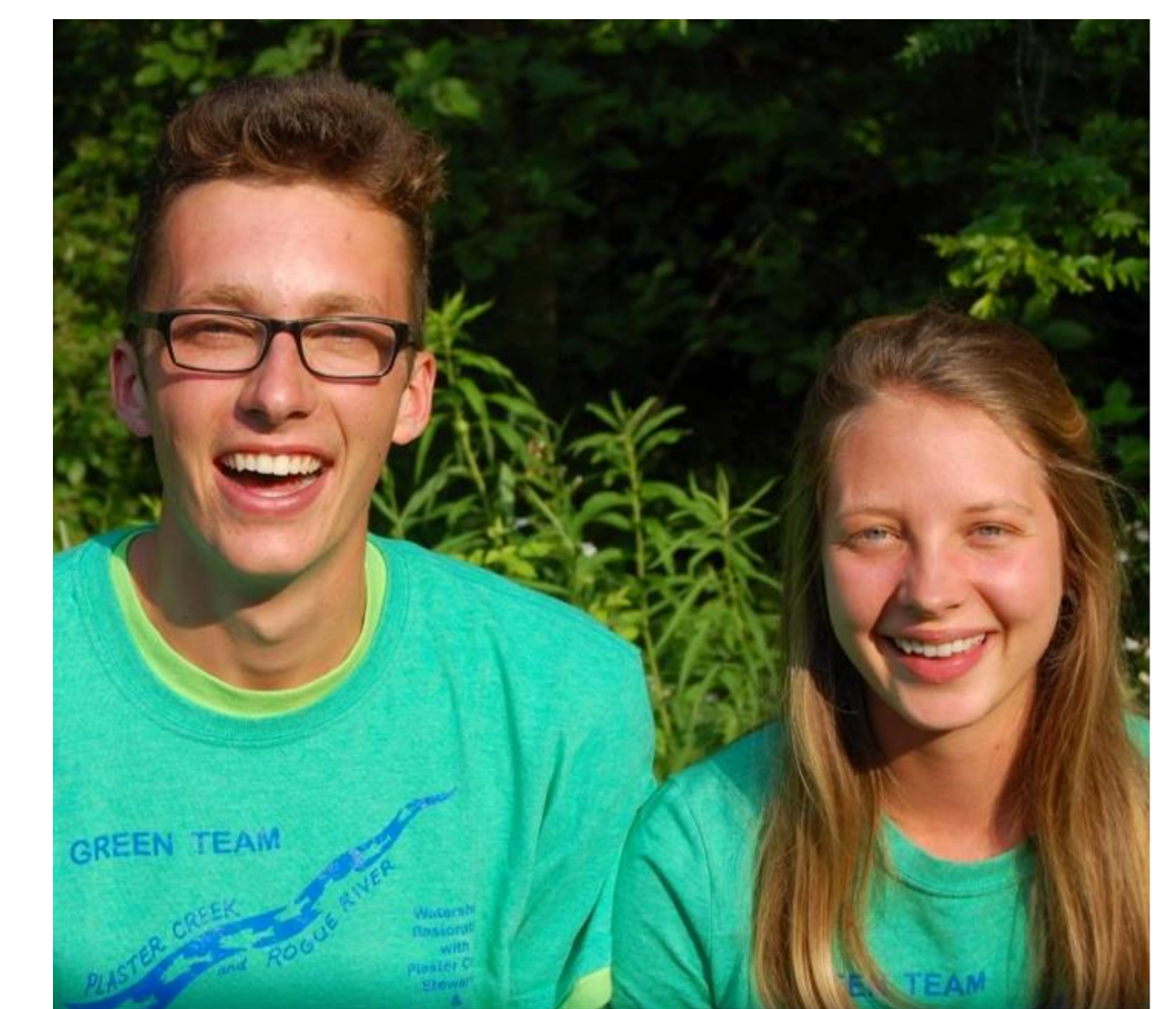
Our Reflections:

Micah:

It has been awesome to work with the Green Team. It has been really cool to get to know each one of them, as every student comes from a different background with different stories, experiences, and lives. Students from the Rogue River Green Team tend to come from a more rural background, while students from the Plaster Creek Green Team come from a more urban background. One of my favorite parts was seeing the Rogue River and Plaster Creek Green Teams working together. It was really cool to see students from very different backgrounds working together for the common goal of restoring the watershed.

Deanna:

Working with the Green Team and fellow college students this summer has been a blast. It's very rewarding to get to know the students on a personal level and encourage them with their future life goals. Every person has a story and I have learned a lot by just hanging out with these young people. Another rewarding aspect was seeing all the projects we have gotten done. The watershed is blooming now with many native plants and excited community members. We are really making a difference in the Plaster Creek watershed!



Acknowledgements

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