

# Rocky Mountain Green Team: Providing Urban Youth a Connection to National Parks

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## About the Partnership

The Rocky Mountain Green Team is a National Park Service Youth Internship Program partnership between Rocky Mountain National Park and Groundwork Denver.

Groundwork Denver, a trust of Groundwork USA (see sidebar), is a community and environmentally focused nonprofit that works in Denver's low income communities. They are focused on "Community Action Environmental Results." The mission of Groundwork Denver is to bring about the sustained improvement of the physical environment and promote health and well-being through community-based partnerships and action. Groundwork Denver works on a variety of urban environmental improvements ranging from tree planting, to toxic cleanup, to energy efficiency improvements, to transit-oriented design. The Groundwork Denver Green Teams consist of two teams of young (14- to 24-year-old), Environmental Associates. The Environmental Associates work on community projects across the city of Denver and in the national parks. The Green Team includes, but is not limited to; community gardens, bicycle advocacy and education, orchard plantings, National Park Service, energy outreach, community clean ups, watershed improvement projects and environmental education and job skill trainings.

The Green Team youth are required to be on college track and have a GPA of 2.5 or above. The goal is to develop young environmental stewards who will have an awareness of natural resource and green jobs as well as an understanding of their impact and place in community. Groundwork Denver provides community action with the goal of producing environmental results and strives toward this mission mostly in low income communities. Over 90 percent of the Green Team youth are from low income families and are recruited from a large minority population. Beginning in 2010, the Green Team expanded from summer to year-round projects. With partnerships like the Rocky Mountain National Park, the Rocky Mountain Arsenal, the City of Denver, Denver Urban Gardens, and many others, the Groundwork Denver Green Teams work to get youth active, teach youth job skills, expose urban youth to the outdoors and make the city of Denver a more healthy and livable community.

## The Internship Program

The Rocky Mountain Green Team is a new summer youth internship program focused on providing opportunities for youth to make personal connections to nature while creating authentic work experiences that lead to NPS jobs. The NPS provides funding, projects, supervision and various training and interpretative programs. Groundwork Denver recruits, hires, trains, supervises, and mentors ten lower income urban youth aged 18-24 to work in the park. The summer of 2010, interns spent five weeks in the park working 40 hours a week while camping together. During the first two weeks the Groundwork Denver staff prepared the youth for their internship. This includes training for challenges of the work duties and the demands of a full time schedule. Many of the interns have spent most of their lives in the inner city and they are out of their comfort zone. To address this challenge and help them feel comfortable in the outdoors, the interns also receive training on camping, outdoor cooking, teamwork and how to be safe. Once the interns were acclimated, they spent time with NPS staff learning about the park, the NPS, and potential career paths. Interns then began three weeks of hard work. They worked with park staff and volunteers on several different projects that included habitat restoration, special projects in campgrounds and trail construction. In the words of one RMGT member, "Working and living at RMNP was an experience that will last a lifetime. I am very grateful."

## Intern Selection Criteria

- Hard worker with a good work ethic
- Positive attitude, enthusiasm, and good personality
- Willingness to learn new things
- Teamwork, leadership, and communication
- Ability to follow directions and complete projects
- Interest in improving the environment

## Next Steps

The program was a success in the first year with positive results that ranged from the tangible, miles of trails built, to the emotional, the interns connections and positive interactions. The program included an extensive assessment and evaluation component that has provided useful feedback that modified the program to improve the intern experience. The internship program will continue in the summer of 2011. Groundwork Denver will recruit and training 10 students and their group leaders to work in the park and explore the NPS.

Another positive note is the interns that are building off of their experience at the park and are creating new job opportunities. Two of the interns from 2010 have applied to the park for STEP positions for the upcoming summer. It is very likely they will be working at the park with the Green Team interns this summer but this time they will be wearing the National Park Service uniform and taking the next step in their careers.

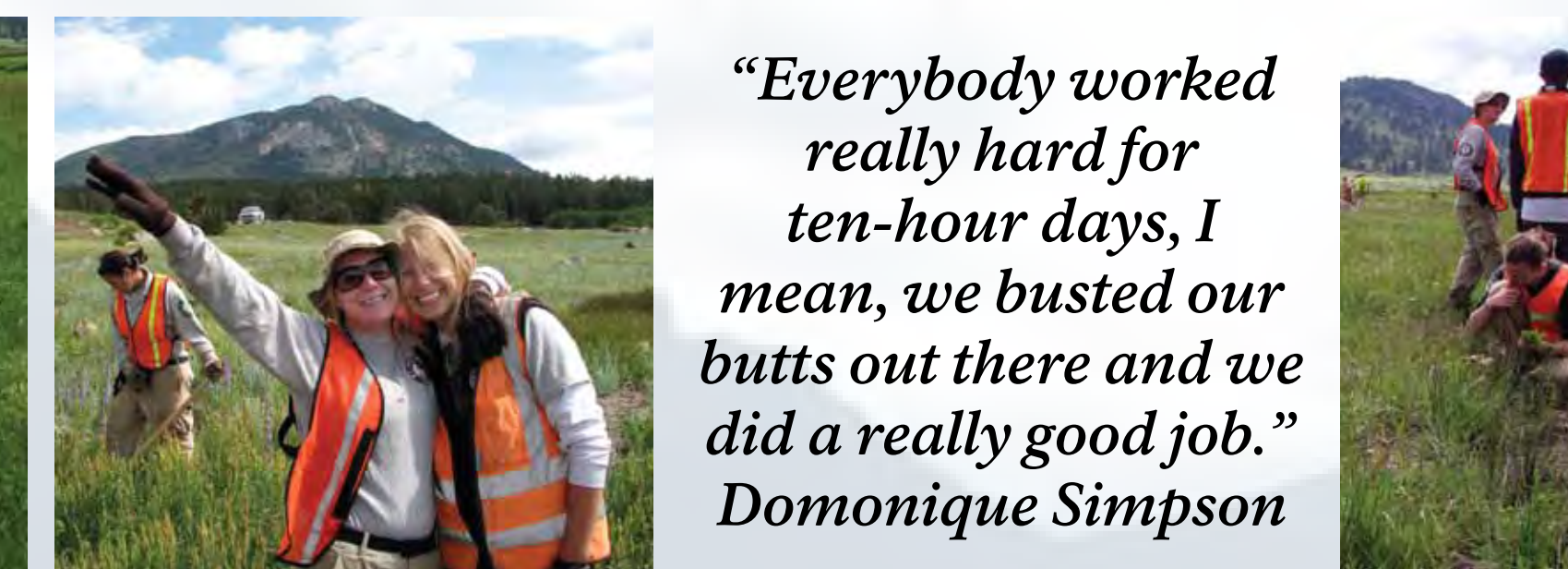
## 2010 Green Team Members

Domonique Simpson  
Myriah Montoya  
Juan Larkin  
Domico Tilmon  
Robert Ortega  
Scott Gemperline  
Fazili Yussufu  
Silver Bakomeza  
Lauren Chapman, youth leader  
Scott Becket, adult leader  
Eric Dinkel, adult leader

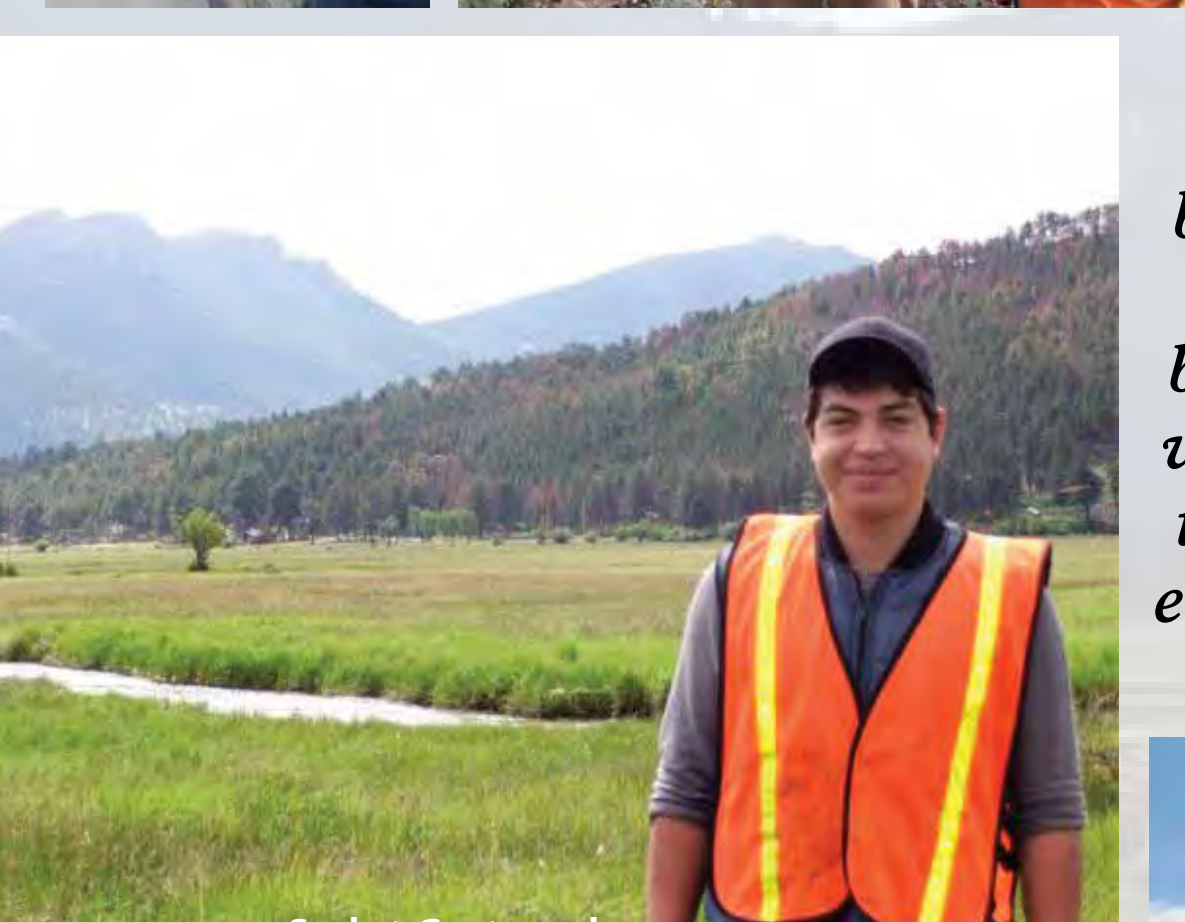


## About Groundwork USA: "Changing Places, Changing Lives"

Groundwork USA is a non-profit organization that works on behalf of a national network of Groundwork trusts. Groundwork trusts are non-profits established across the United States in places that have experienced decades of decline in their physical and social environments. Their mission is to foster and awaken the potential of these neighborhoods by working with communities to improve their physical environment. In doing so, the hope is to help neighborhoods gain a renewed sense of place, opportunity, and pride.



*"Everybody worked really hard for ten-hour days, I mean, we busted our butts out there and we did a really good job."*  
Domonique Simpson



*"I got to see plants I've never seen before, be at heights I've never been before, and I mean I was challenged with the altitude and the elevation a little bit."*  
Robert Ortega



*"It's just kind of like a puzzle, you keep on meeting new people and they connect you to somebody else."*  
Scott Gemperline



*"Once we left to set up our campsite I felt privileged as it was my first s'more around a campfire and my first overnight camping experience. It was weird, I was spending it with my coworkers and friends but I wouldn't have it any other way."*  
Sadot Castaneda



*"One very good socializing experience I had was putting up the tents. It was fun because we were not sure how to pitch them but we were all laughing together in the attempt."*  
Michael Nothem



*"Immersing ourselves in nature's grasp, I found was bittersweet. I liked the silence; being away from everything, it was nice as a city boy. No text messages, no e-mails, and no phone calls, but on the other side of that spectrum I missed my amenities."*  
Nick Arosemena



*"As I woke up arriving at the Rocky Mountain National Park I wasn't really amazed by the mountains that have always been there. However, once we began the drive up to 11,500 ft above sea level, I was surprised and taken by the beauty the mountains were hiding. I couldn't help but stare into the fog that I rarely saw back home. The fog made me feel at peace as I realized that I was getting down to earth with Mother Nature. However, continuous extreme weather made us all realize that nature was nothing to take lightly."*  
Sadot Castaneda

