



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# USDA Forest Service Eastern Region Urban Connections Program

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Antoinette “Tonee” Davis

Urban Connections Coordinator

Newark, NJ

# What is Urban Connections?

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Minneapolis/St. Paul



**Erik Johnson**  
Resource Assistant



**Sonja Lin**  
Program Manager



**Jenniqua Johnson**  
St. Louis



**Lisa Perez**  
Detroit



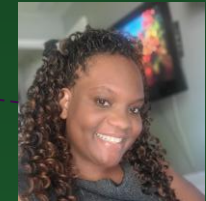
**Indya Hunt**  
Program Assistant



**Jessie Scott**  
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**Antoinette Davis**  
Newark



**Gia Rich**  
Program Assistant

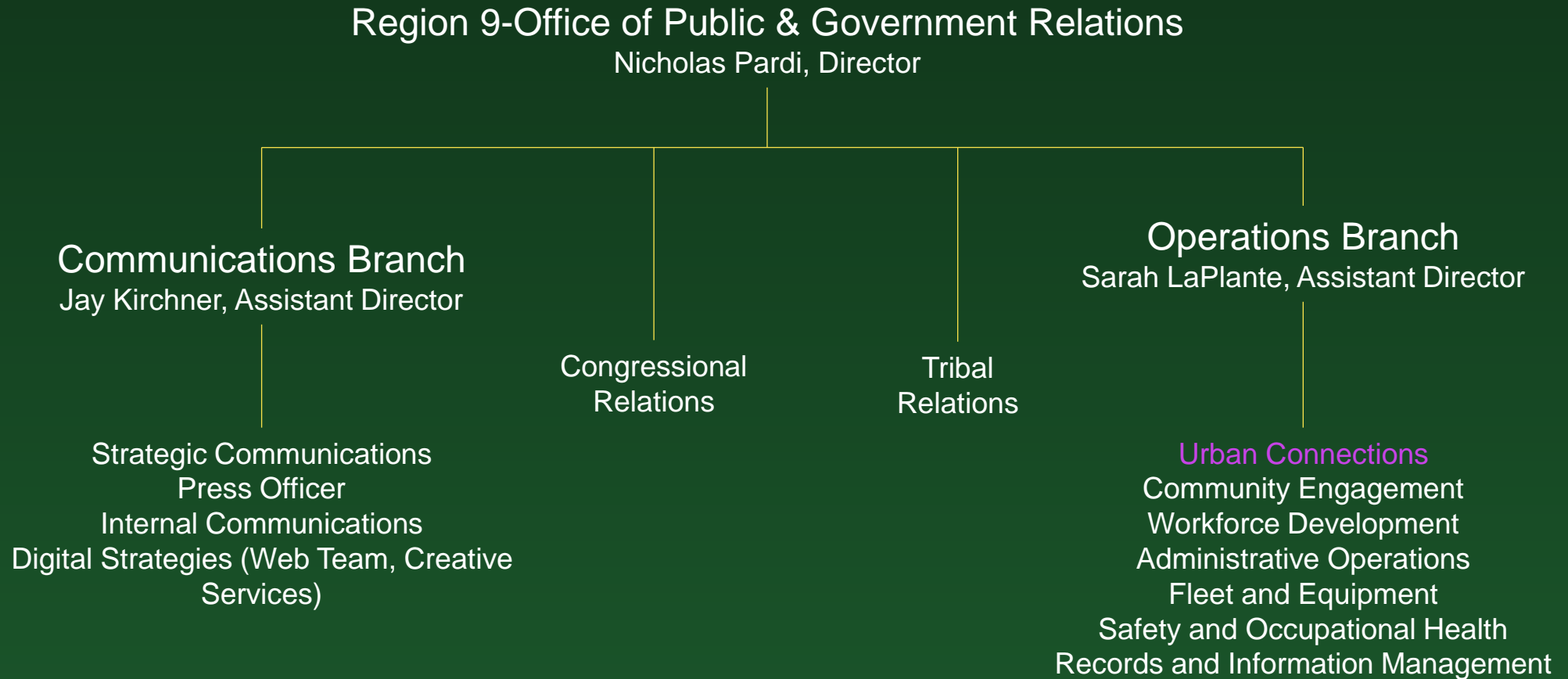


# Current Partners

American Forests	Dunes Learning Center	Growing Futures	Outdoor Afro	Temple University
Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area	The Eden Theological Seminary	Healthy Kidz, Inc.	Outdoors Empowered Network	Touch of Nature Center, Carbondale
Appalachian Mountain Club	Edward Cooper Center	The Henry Ford	Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (SCA)	Tower Grove Park
Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University	Ely Tourism Bureau	Hubbard Brook Research Foundation	Rensselaer Youth Outdoors	Tree Trust
Audubon Great Lakes	Emerald Necklace Conservancy	International Wildlife Refuge Alliance/Detroit Outdoors	River City Foundation	Trees for Tomorrow Environmental Education Center
Awbury Arboretum	E Inc.	Lake Wapogasset Lutheran Bible Camp	Rocking the Boat	Trout Unlimited
Boys 2 Men Youth Counseling Services	Environment for the Americas	Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics	Scouts of the Greater St. Louis Area	University of New Hampshire GLOBE
Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods, The Mission Continues	Experience Learning	Let's Go Outdoors	Ser Metro	Urban Ecology Center
Buren Chapel AME	Faith in Place	Lexington School for the Deaf	Shaw Institute for Field Training	Urban Roots
The Bus for Outdoor Access and Teaching	Friends of Rouge Park	Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation	Shelburne Farms	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Child & Family Services of Northwestern Michigan, YouthWork Program	Friends of the Detroit River	Metropolitan Congregations United	Southern Wayne Advocacy Council	Vermont Parks and Recreation
Chill Foundation	Frogtown Green	Michigan State University Extension	Southwest Boston Community Development Corporation	Wabanaki Youth in Science
Connected Points	Go Find Outdoors Natural Inquirer	Mystic River Watershed Association	Speak for the Trees	Wilderness Inquiry
CorpsTHAT	Greening Youth Foundation	National Forest Foundation	Student Conservation Association	Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center
Cream City Conservation and Consulting	The Green Door Initiative	The Nature of Cities	Superior Watershed Partnership	
Davey Tree	The Greening of Detroit	Northwoods Volunteer Connections	Sustainable Forestry Initiative Project Learning Tree	
Detroit Zoological Society	Groundwork RI	Northland College	The Take 1 Community Program	
	Groundwork Somerville			

# Organization

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# Urban Connections Governance

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- **UC Coordinator:** day-to-day face of the Forest Service in the urban area.
- **Core Team:** appointed by steering team and assists with on-the-ground activities.
- **Steering Team:** oversees outreach efforts and the core team; made up of NFS, S&PF, and R&D-NRS.
- **Advisory Board:** help ensure the program is best aligned with Regional and National goals and priorities, providing strategic guidance on topics such as Regional expansion, programmatic focus, synergy across Forest Service programs, and measures of success.

# Urban Connections Objectives

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## Goal 1: Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands

- 1.1 Foster resilient, adaptive ecosystems to contribute to livable communities.*
- 1.2 Communicate wildfire prevention messages.*
- 1.3 Collaborate with communities to conserve open space.*

## Goal 2: Deliver Benefits to the Public

- 2.1 Communicate the benefits of forests.*
- 2.2 Strengthen communities.*
- 2.3 Connect people to the outdoors.*

## Goal 3. Excel as a High-Performing Agency

- 3.1 Serve as urban outreach specialists for the agency.*
- 3.2 Assist with recruiting a diverse workforce.*
- 3.3 Promote an inclusive culture.*

## Forest Service Equity Actions

#2 Enhance Engagement and Partnerships with Tribes and Underserved Communities through Culturally Relevant Strategies

#3 Achieve a Representative, Inclusive, and Thriving Forest Service Workforce

#6 Increase Equity in Agreements

#9 Expand Urban Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities

#10 Promote Access to Recreation and Outdoor Experiences within Communities of Color and Socially Vulnerable Populations

# Question

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- How often do you interact with urban communities?
- A. Never
- B. 1 -3 times per year
- C. 5 times per year
- D. More than 5 times per year.

Please provide your answer in the chat.





Wilderness Inquiry



## Canoemobile Pyramid of Engagement

Progression per 10,000 youth served

- Desire to “give back” begins
- Interest in outdoor stewardship evolves
- 50% considering environmental careers



- Reduced fear of unknown
- Increased independence
- 70% developed strong bonds with peers, community & environment



Outcomes

**ENGAGEMENT**  
Building trust, skills, and teamwork  
[ 1,000+ youth on overnight experiences ]



- 87% more engaged in school
- 96% learn new skills
- 88% increased teamwork

**INTRODUCTION**  
Inspiring confidence, curiosity and wonder  
[ 10,000+ youth on introductory outdoor day experiences ]

Outcomes

Outcomes

**INTERNSHIPS  
& SUMMER JOBS**  
[ 250 youth ]



Outcomes

Hundreds of new faces in outdoor and environmental careers.

**CAREERS**  
[ 100 youth ]

### The Three C's Key:

- Connection
- Competence
- Contribution

- Increased leadership
- Able to envision long-term goals
- Awareness and connection to larger community

**IMMERSION**  
Developing grit and determination  
[ 500+ youth on multi-day experiences ]

Outcomes

K-12  
Schools

Youth  
Organizations

Community  
Groups

Faith-Based  
Organizations



# Newark

- Started February 2024



# Newark Steering Team

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- Jamie Davidson
  - Forest Supervisor, Allegheny National Forest
- Robert Gentry
  - Field Representative, State, Private and Tribal Forestry
- Paul Schmidt
  - Senior Director of Conservation Programs, National Forest Foundation
- John Sinclair
  - Forest Supervisor, Green National Forest
- Erika Svendsen
  - Research Social Scientist, Northern Research Station
- Sarah LaPlante
  - Public and Government Relations Assistant Director of Operations, Eastern Region
- Nicholas Pardi
  - Public and Government Relations Director, Eastern Region

# Current Agreements and Partnerships

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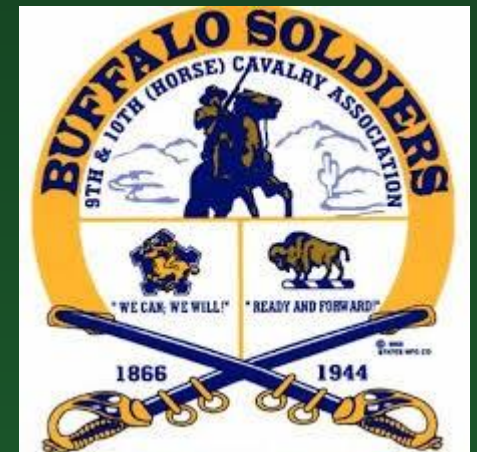
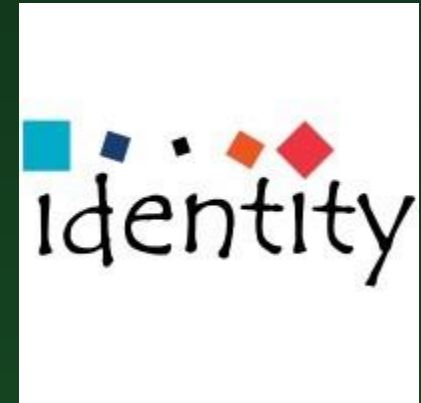
National Forest Foundation

Identity Inc. (WO)

Buffalo Soldiers (WO)

The Nature of Cities (NYC Urban Field Station)

Grey Towers National Historic Site



# Question

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- Do you consider urban audiences when planning your yearly program of work?
- Yes or No

Please answer in the chat.



# Grey Towers Partnership

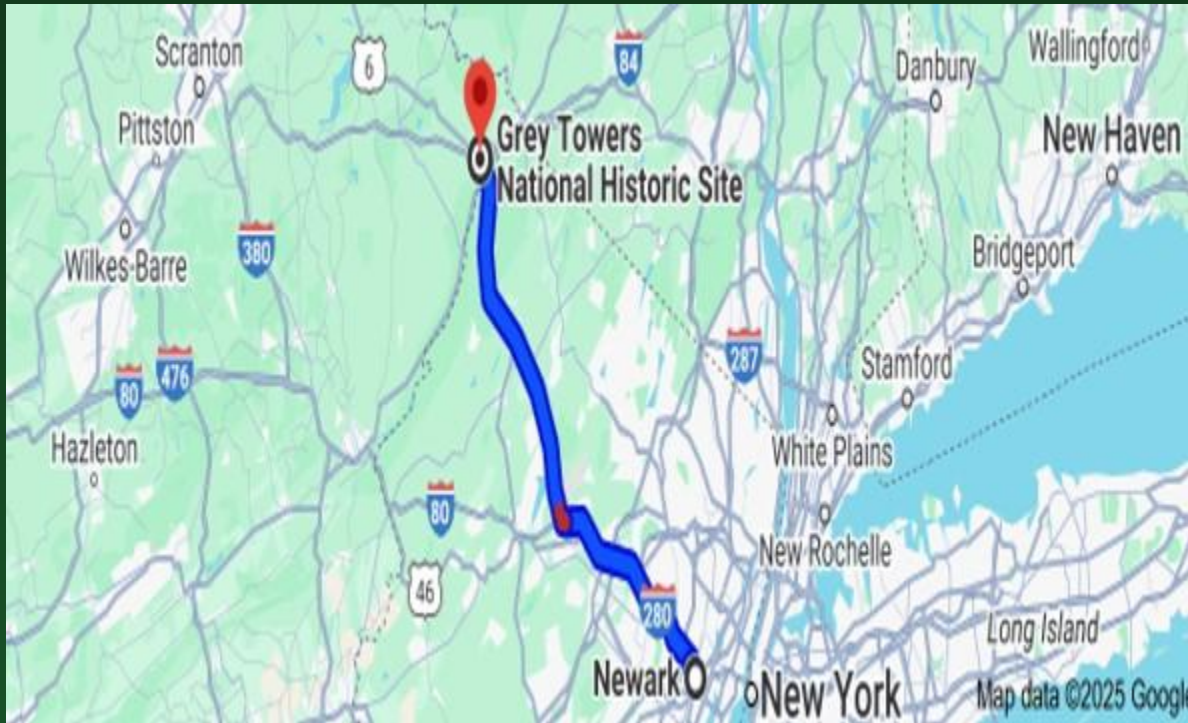
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- Grey Towers was the home of Gifford Pinchot, founder and first Chief of the US Forest Service. Located in Milford, Pennsylvania, Grey Towers was completed in 1886 by Gifford's father, James Pinchot, a successful businessman and philanthropist. Today Grey Towers offers, trails, various wayside exhibits, free visitor films, conference and meeting spaces, free parking, visitor center, gifts shop, and ticketed museum tours.

# Grey Towers Partnership Cont.

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- Grey Towers is located 63 miles from Newark, NJ
- Residents of Grey Towers can take public transportation from Newark to Grey Towers
- Grey Towers is currently working with New Jersey Transit to offer a special pass the encourage residents to visit.



# Multi City Agreements



[Outdoors Empowered Network](https://www.outdoorsempowered.org/) – Building Gear Libraries for diverse access <https://www.outdoorsempowered.org/>

[Leave No Trace](https://lnt.org/) - Urban initiative <https://lnt.org/>

[BOAT: Bus for Outdoor Access and Teaching](https://theboatbus.com/) -<https://theboatbus.com/>

[Outdoor Afro](https://outdoorafro.org/) - Connecting families to the outdoors <https://outdoorafro.org/>

[Wilderness Inquiry](https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/) – Canoemobile and forest explorations <https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/>



# Sharing Urban Connections through networking

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- Girl Scouts of Central and Northern New Jersey
- Essex County Environmental Center
- Urban Waters and the Passaic River/Newark (New Jersey)
- Outdoor Afro New Jersey
- New Jersey Urban and Community Forestry

# Essex County Environmental Center Earth Day Celebration



- Made seed balls with locals that attended the event
- Provided information about the Urban Connections Program

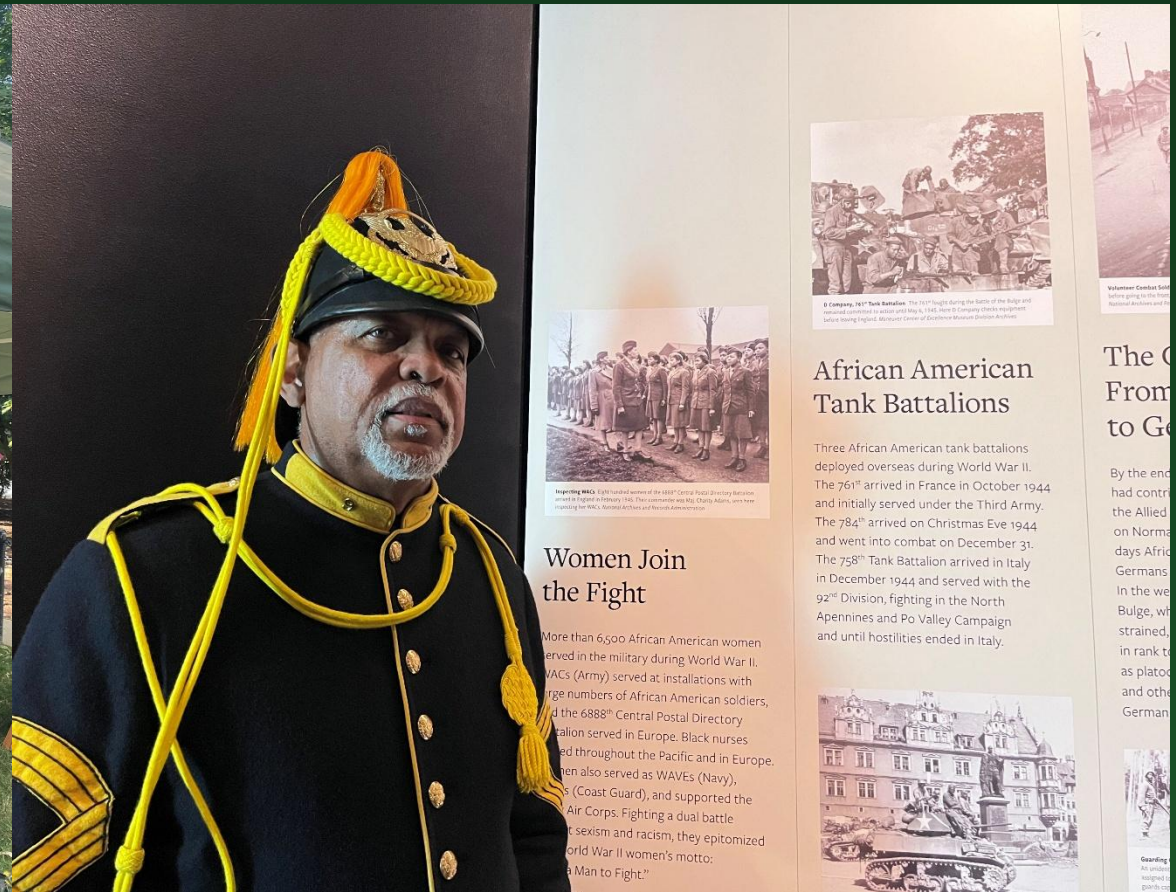


# 2024 Canoe Mobile Partnering with the City of Newark





# Buffalo Soldiers



# GBO- Get Black Outside

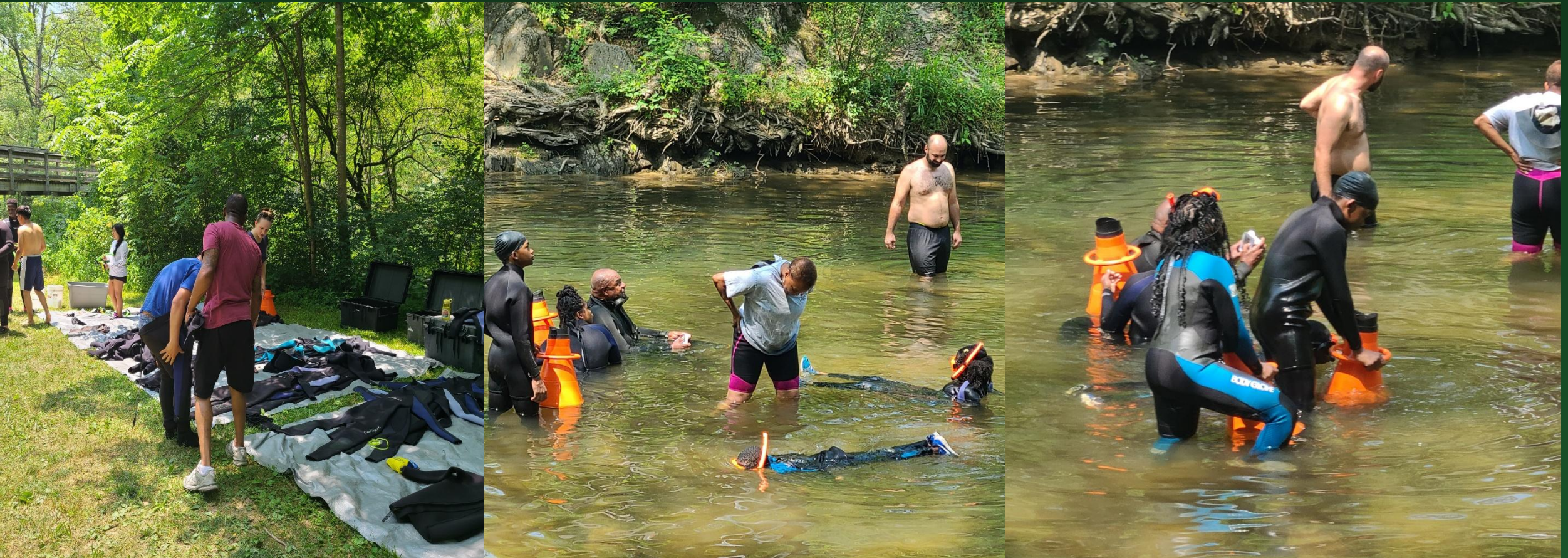
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# GBO- George Washington Jefferson NF

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