

# Dept. of Natural Resources: Partners with Operation Fresh Start for hands-on job training

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**MADISON, Wis.** – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is partnering with Operation Fresh Start, a Madison-based nonprofit, for hands-on job training at state properties across Wisconsin.

Launched in October 2021, the Conservation Academy with Operation Fresh Start provides a pathway for graduates to enter forestry and land conservation careers. This past spring, crew members worked side-by-side with DNR parks and recreation staff on various stewardship and restoration projects and will join staff again this fall to work with the DNR's Wildlife Management and Natural Heritage Conservation programs.

“It’s exciting to have the DNR involved in such a hands-on educational experience for young people to learn more about careers in conservation, park management and natural areas stewardship,” said Brian Hefty, DNR Parks and Recreation Management Deputy Director. “We are proud to continue this partnership this year and hope to see some graduates of the Conservation Academy pursue future careers with the DNR.”

In April, the crew worked to help park staff at Lake Kegonsa State Park in Stoughton to get the campgrounds ready for the season. They cut, trimmed and chipped trees, fixed picnic tables, blew leaves and cleaned up park trails.

“It was great having Operation Fresh Start work with us this year. The crew was a huge help in getting the park ready for our visitors for the busy spring and summer. The crew worked hard and were willing to take on any project asked of them,” said

Sarah Bolser, DNR Lake Kegonsa State Park Property Manager.

In April, three Conservation Academy participants planted spruce trees along Verona Road that will eventually create a sound barrier along the Military Ridge State Trail. The crew planted 39 trees in one day while removing debris along the trail as they went.

The Conservation Academy is a full-time, \$15 per hour paid conservation training program for people ages 18 - 24. Members work and train with industry professionals and gain hands-on experience working in parks, natural areas and neighborhoods throughout south-central Wisconsin. Successful program completion includes placement into a career in a green industry trade.

Graduates of the Conservation Academy gain experience and training to pursue a career in conservation and forestry while assisting partner organizations like the DNR in efforts to recruit and diversify their pool of qualified applicants. The program combines industry work standards, advanced technical field instruction, and a motivational and supportive supervisor/mentee relationship.

This Fall, Operation Fresh Start crews will work with the DNR's Wildlife Management and Natural Heritage Conservation programs. You can learn more about Operation Fresh Start [here](#). Find out more about the Wisconsin State Park System by visiting the DNR website [here](#).