Inventory And Monitoring Network Staff Work With Area Students

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Students from DC's Capital City Public Charter School practice NCRN I&M vegetation monitoring techniques. NPS photo.

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Seniors from an urban ecology class at Capital City Public Charter School in Washington, DC, got to explore a national park in their backyard this winter along with staff from National Capital Region's Network Inventory & Monitoring program.

Despite chilly weather, students ventured out into the woods of Fort Slocum, a Civil War fort within Rock Creek Park, to identify and measure trees, I&M-style.

Network botanist Liz Matthews and communicator Megan Nortrup first led a classroom discussion of I&M forest monitoring methods, the NPS, and careers in biology. Then, in the Fort Slocum woods, students laid out a vegetation monitoring plot and divided into groups to identify and take dbh measurements (diameter at breast height) of trees. Even without having leaves to use in identification, students quickly learned to discern white oaks from chestnut oaks and got the hang of using dbh tapes and accurately recording their data.

Follow-up work included calculating the basal area of each tree species and comparing their Fort Slocum data to other NCRN I&M plots in Rock Creek Park.

Classroom teacher Ellen Royse reported that after the activity, "several students approached me with questions about careers in field biology."

The network also works with students in National Capital Region throughout the school year by providing internships to 11th graders from the Washington Lab School. These student interns work on a variety of tasks, including processing biological specimens such as lichens and bees collected in parks, scanning documents and slides, and helping water lab staff clean glassware and perform chemistry analyses.

The network will also host undergraduate student interns from the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus (UMBC), during the upcoming 2014 summer field season. The UMBC students will assist in a variety of projects, including a survey of surviving American chestnut trees, long-term forest vegetation monitoring, and stream water quality monitoring.