Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy

Young Naturalists
YOUNG NATURALISTS PROGRAM MISSION

To build a learning community that connects teens who are interested in nature with peers and mentors and provides experiences that provoke and scaffold inquiry, provide service-learning opportunities, and spark aspirations to future science learning and green careers.
About the Program

• STEM focus: Environmental Science
• Paid 5-week summer internship for high school students
• Learn about the plants, animals, fungi, etc. of our region
• Work outdoors to improve the health of our greenspaces
• Meet environmental professionals and learn about possible education and career pathways
• Meet other teens join a community of people who are passionate about the outdoors and the environment
Program Participants

• Recruit from partner schools: PPS and charter schools serving youth of color and high economic need

• Schools participate in High School Urban EcoStewards, a multi-visit school year program

• Students may apply directly or be nominated by a teacher

• Share program application materials widely with area science teachers and like-minded community organizations, emphasizing that we encourage application from students who may not have had this kind of experience before
Program Successes

• Started in 2014 with 5 students; since 2018 have served 10-12 students/year, including students from Western Pa School for the Deaf

• >50% non-male students and representation of LGBTQ youth

• Most recent year’s data show significant shifts in students’ perception of the traits of scientists, from relatively fixed traits (e.g., “smart”) to those that are more reflective of a growth mindset (“curious,” “hardworking,” “innovative”)
Program Challenges

• Stable/decreasing proportion of applicants of color; increase in applicants from private schools

• Working on more consistent alumni engagement and intentional pathways from other PPC programs

• Open to any student completed 9th-12th grade – students in very different places in their academic lives

• Struggle with record-keeping and documentation during intense summer program season