

# Corvallis Gazette-Times

## Stimulus program puts teens to work pulling Scotch broom

By Rachel Beck, Gazette-Times reporter | Posted: Thursday, April 29, 2010 7:00 am



‘I’m wearing my mud high heels,’ said Nichelle Booker of Northwest Youth Corps, 19, as she pitched a chunk of scotch broom onto the pile just before another rainfall in Wren. (Scobel Wiggins/ Gazette-Times)

Nichelle Booker used to think the yellow blooms of Scotch broom were pretty.

“Little did I know I’d be yanking it out for days,” she said.

But the Corvallis 19-year-old was happy to be in a meadow near Wren on a wet Wednesday morning along with eight other teens, pulling Scotch broom, an invasive, noxious weed, from the ground.

Booker and the others are part of Outdoors Oregon, a program funded by federal stimulus money that falls under the umbrella of Northwest Youth Corps.

The crew works with a different community partner each week of the five-week program, which started Monday. For Wednesday’s project, the crew partnered with the Marys River Watershed Council. Next week, they’ll be working with Corvallis Parks and Recreation.

As the rain poured down Wednesday, the teens quietly pulled on rain slickers, hardly stopping their work.

The meadows the crew cleared of Scotch broom are habitat for Fender’s blue butterfly, an endangered species.

Karen Fleck Harding of the Marys River Watershed Council said the plan is to eventually plant wildflowers on the privately owned property for food sources for the butterfly.

Booker said the first site the crew cleared had lots of small plants, which was a little tedious. “You had to get down and dirty with it,” she said.

But she’s finding something to appreciate about hard labor.

“I think it’s good for my character,” she said.

The rain wasn't a problem for Asa Hackett, 18, of Corvallis.

"The ground's all muddy," he said. "It makes the roots come up easier."

The pay — minimum wage — was an appealing part of the job.

"(But) I really do like working outdoors," he said.

And despite the early starts, he likes the schedule.

"Getting up early, going to bed early ... it's good to me," he said.

Trevor Webb, 17, of Adair Village, said the skills he's learning will be useful in the future, when he hopefully becomes a landscaper.

"It's pretty cool," he said. "It gives you some work experience and a way to get money, especially when it's hard for teens to get jobs right now."

The job appealed to Booker because the tasks are all conservation-related.

"I thought it'd be pretty awesome," she said. "I really like that we learn so much about the environment and different species."

"It's a great thing to be a part of," she said. And if the butterfly gets off the endangered species list, "It's like, 'oh, I helped do that.'"

Scotch broom seeds last in the soil 50 to 70 years, Harding said. "It'll be back," she said. "We'll have to come back and do it again."

Program director Tom Helmer hopes Outdoor Oregon will be back, too. The funding ends in late summer, but he'd like to find a way to make it into a long-term, much-larger, program.

Dallas Hanthorn, 19, of Philomath, was excited to land a place on the crew. He recently ended a similar job with Community Services Consortium.

"I loved the job so much, and realized one of the main things I want to do in my life is make a difference in the environment," he said.

"It makes me feel good that I'm actually doing something that benefits the world."

Even morning rain couldn't bring him down.

"I wake up in the morning ready to go to my work," he said. "It's really fun."