

# Conservation Team-Staff Bios



Whitney Carleton-DeGeorge  
NY Works Project Coordinator

Whitney is an enthusiastic terrestrial and wetland plant biologist, she has a BS in Plant Biology and Environmental Science (MSU) and is finishing a MS in Wetland and Watershed Resources at SUNY ESF. Whitney first started conservation work at the Ganondagan State Historic Site in the summer of 2013. She has initiated large-scale programming and projects with the help of volunteers and interns to reduce invasive species and restore historical plant compositions on site. Her original task was to maintain an 80-acre oak opening on site via site surveys and approvals for prescribed burning. With these goals becoming realized, objectives have expanded to include overseeing large-scale projects throughout Ganondagan and helping to implement a large wetland restoration at Seneca Lake State Park in Geneva, NY. Whitney looks forward to continuing to expand the conservation efforts throughout the Finger Lakes Region of NYS Parks and talking with the public about all the wonderful projects taking place at Ganondagan.

*“It’s not just land that is broken, but more importantly, our relationship to land.”* - Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants



Alexis VanWinkle  
Supervising Conservation Steward

Alexis enjoys the work she does with grassland and forest plants as well as birds that use Ganondagan State Historic Site as a home. She has an AS in Science for Natural Resources Conservation from Finger Lakes Community College and is attending SUNY Brockport to receive her Bachelors in Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology. Alexis started working at Ganondagan SHS as a volunteer in 2013, her volunteerism transformed into an internship and she was hired in 2015 as a Supervising Conservation Steward. Alexis helps the Conservation Team progress conservation projects on site by sourcing volunteer and organizational help and working closely with the FORCES Conservation and Junior Conservation Stewards interning at the site. She has worked to get the Prescribed Burn Management Plan approved through both the DEC and OPRHP as well as help compile a Comprehensive Invasive Species Management Plan for all projects happening on site. Alexis maintains the Eastern Bluebird Nest Box Trail and educates volunteers and interns on the importance of grassland and field bird species and the effect of invasive bird species on local populations of Eastern bluebirds.

*“We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.” – Mother Teresa*



Kyle J. Webster  
Supervising Conservation Steward

Kyle is a passionate outdoor enthusiast who loves to backpack and study our native flora. He has an AAS in Horticulture, an AS in Sciences (FLCC) and a BS in Conservation Biology at SUNY-ESF. Kyle first became involved with Ganondagan in 2014 when he interned as a FORCES Conservation Steward working to control the invasive plant, pale swallow-wort. He now focuses on the restoration of oak savannas on site, a globally endangered ecosystem that historically occurred throughout this area of New York. Additionally, he works to progress the myriad of other large-scale conservation projects along with interns and the Conservation Team. He is dedicated to preserving our natural heritage and bringing successful conservation efforts to the Finger Lakes Region of NYS Parks. Kyle excitedly looks forward to enjoying spring blossoms and summer blooms, winter's subtle beauty and autumn's vivid colors with patrons and colleagues at Ganondagan State Historic Site.

*"The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness."* -John Muir, The Wilderness World of John Muir: A Selection From His Collected Work.



Patty Wakefield  
Assistant Program Coordinator-Watercraft Inspection Program

After raising her children, Patty Wakefield-Brown went back to school to pursue her passion, the environment. She received her A.A.S. in Natural Resource Conservation and an A.S. in Environmental Science from Finger Lakes Community College and went on to get a B.S. in Environmental Science with a concentration in Aquatic Ecology from SUNY Brockport. She has been with NYS Parks and Recreation Environmental Management Bureau for 4 ½ years.

She began as the Water Quality Specialist, stationed at Hamlin Beach State Park. Two years ago, Patty accepted an offer to be the Lead Boat Steward for the Watercraft Inspection Program. The 2016 season will be the third summer for the program and Patty will be the Assistant Program Coordinator. Patty's passion for the environment resonates in her ability to spread the message of being a steward to the environment. She loves birding, hiking, water and "being" in the outdoors.

*"If we all did just one little thing every day to help the planet, what a difference we could make."*





Brigitte Wierzbicki  
Lead Conservation Steward

Brigitte is a plant and insect biologist and SUNY ESF graduate with a BS in Environmental Biology. Brigitte first started conservation work at Ganondagan State Historic Site in 2014, where she established an invasive insect management plan focusing on the imminent invasion of EAB. While at ESF, Brigitte continued EAB surveys with Cornell Cooperative Extension, and worked in Dr. Melissa Fierke's Forest Entomology lab, contributing to an EAB parasitoid establishment survey and a tick and tick-borne disease distribution study while researching tick habitat associations. As ESF FORCES Vice President, Brigitte engaged the campus community and led invasive species surveys, removals, and restoration projects within NYS Parks.

Brigitte is excited to be back at Ganondagan, focusing on restoring the Pollinator Grassland and the Seneca cultural Green Plants Trail. She looks forward to increasing the native plant and pollinator biodiversity of these areas, especially through the help of Ganondagan's generous plant donors. She hopes to contribute to the interpretive value of the Green Plants trail, adding species to preserve and celebrate Seneca culture of the past and present.

*"We are all connected by our common understanding of the calls filling the night at the start of spring. It is the wordless chorus of longing that resonates within us, the longing to continue, to participate in the sacred life of the world."* -Robin Wall Kimmerer, Gathering Moss



Emma Kubinski  
Junior Conservation Steward

After attending Ganondagan's Conservation Program in the summer of 2014, Emma became interested in the conservation work on site. Since then, she has interned at the site assisting Whitney, Alexis, and Kyle. She has learned many things and has helped to solidify her passion for the environment, specifically terrestrial plants, which she plans to study in college this upcoming fall. With her mentors guidance she has had the chance to contribute to the site in many ways. She has gained a lot of experience in; participating in invasive species removal, grant writing, helping facilitate public and interagency meetings, researching skills, coordinating plant donations, and more. Emma will continue helping out on site and is excited to assist in future plans.

*"We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children"*-Native American Proverb