Bluestem Impact Projects

Bluestem is a nature preserve and conservation cemetery located in Cedar Grove, NC.
Website: https://www.bluestemcemetery.org

Students are recommended to read Bluestem's Ecological Assessment (prepared by Master Naturalist students in 2024) to help formulate their ideas for projects.

Project 1 - Land Assessment and Management
Bluestem is 87 acres of open land and Piedmont forest in Cedar Grove, NC. It provides a unique opportunity to learn how to assess and manage land for conservation. Students may select to:

- participate in an existing butterfly inventory project
- participate in the Bumble Bee Altas (see Xerces Society description for details)
- research and recommend native plant species introduction at the forest edge, for prairie grasslands, along water quality buffers
- participate in ecological assessments and inventories - species, habitat type, etc. Examples include spring ephemeral assessment, raptor assessment, habitat assessments for particular species, etc.
- contribute to ongoing GIS work and support Bluestem's land management plans
- participate in restoration projects, including managing invasive species and restoring native plants
- research local burn associations, develop controlled burn educational materials, and participate in a controlled burn

Many projects (butterfly inventory, GIS, plan development, and restoration work) continue over the course of the year. Other inventory projects are often tied to when the focus species are active. Bluestem is open to Master Naturalist's ideas, and requests agreement that both parties must benefit from the learning relationship. Thus, if a project proposal is not aligned with Bluestem's needs, we will ask for a different project proposal.

Useful skills - depending on the project, but could include species identification, iNaturalist, photography, GIS, documenting, hands-on restoration work.

Project location - Bluestem, 1900 Hurdle Mills Road, Cedar Grove, NC, with much of the work possible off-site.

Contact at organization: Jeff Masten jeff@bluestemcemetery.org is the primary contact; depending on the specifics of your project, you may work with others on their team. Students must be able to work independently, have strong communications skills, and an appreciation for Bluestem balancing its conservation work with the operation of a busy cemetery. Teams of students are also welcome.

Project 2 - Community Engagement
Bluestem has a deep history; people visit the property and connect for many different reasons. Introducing the concept of a nature preserve with a conservation cemetery can take many forms. Bluestem values telling the land's story in a variety of ways:

- introducing a nature preserve to the Cedar Grove/Northern Orange County farming community
- developing presentations/short videos for the public
- leading nature walks or talks on site
- researching the land's history through county records
- developing art projects conveying the rhythms of the land and its inhabitants,
- developing Citizen Science opportunities (eg. a Scavenger Hunt for kids)
- developing ideas for educating the public on Everyday Conservation
- researching options for creating a navigable route for visitors with limited mobility

Bluestem appreciates ideas that are well researched and include a pilot experiment in the initial phase. Projects can be completed within the course of the year.

Useful skills - photography, writing, mapping, video, public speaking, leading walks, or education experience could all be useful skills.

Project location - Bluestem, 1900 Hurdle Mills Road, Cedar Grove, NC, with much of the work possible off-site.

Contact at organization: Heidi Hannapel, heidi@bluestemcemetery.org is the primary contact. Depending on the specifics of your project, you may work with others on their team. Students must be able to work independently, have strong communications skills, and an appreciation for Bluestem balancing its conservation work with the operation of a busy cemetery.