

VI. Tree Inventory Researcher

The Setting

Delgado Community College occupies a heavily wooded campus of about 53 acres in New Orleans. They received a \$16,000 federal grant for tree maintenance. In order to plan how to use the money, they needed an assessment of the number and condition of the trees on the campus. They wanted to know how many of each kind of tree they had, what pruning was needed, how many of the trees were wounded, and where vines had to be removed. A team of 42 youths and six supervisors conducted this tree inventory.

Comparable Settings

In a similar project, the same youths conducted a timber cruise on 8-acre Scout Island near New Orleans. They divided into six crews. Each crew charted the pine trees on a segment of the island and estimated their timber value. Then, they combined their findings and presented them to the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Projects like this -- inventorying and assessing the maintenance needs of natural resources -- are needed in a wide variety of settings, from waterfronts to flowerbeds. Similar tasks relate to purchased resources, ranging from cataloging office and medical equipment in a hospital to athletic equipment at recreation centers.

The Work

The team first developed a work plan, allocating time, people and equipment needed to conduct the inventory. They prepared a map of the campus, and designed a data sheet to record the number, size and condition of each tree. To count and rate the trees, they divided the map into several areas, and broke their team into several smaller teams. Each team inventoried one area. Then, they brought their data together, summarized it, and graphed the results. They formulated maintenance recommendations from the results of the inventory. Finally, they presented their findings and recommendations to the local beautification committee.

The Learning

In addition to the knowledge about trees, team members learned about systems by understanding how the trees would respond to alternative maintenance programs. They learned about resources by scheduling time and people to accomplish the inventory. They developed interpersonal skills by working as a team to develop and act on the work plan. They learned information skills by preparing a map, designing the data sheet, conducting the inventory, summarizing the data, drawing conclusions, and presenting them to the local beautification committee. Finally, they learned about technology by selecting the tools they would need to accomplish the inventory and summarize the data.

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