

Summer Internship Report 2017

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Hometown: Birmingham, Alabama



**The Nature Conservancy
Birmingham, Alabama**

Provide an overview of the organization/research project and a summary of your responsibilities, tasks, and/or projects.

The Nature Conservancy tasked me with working on collecting research on the political climate of states in the southeastern region of the United States. This research included specific information regarding the individuals in key positions of power in each state, sources of dedicated funding for conservation in each state, and current news regarding conservation in each state. I also created documents detailing important conservation programs in each state as well as the avenues through which funding for conservation has been gained and allotted in each of these states. My responsibilities included completing multiple reports regarding these individual states and participating in field work that worked towards urban conservation in the Birmingham area. I was also able to participate in a full week of field work in the Paint Rock River Valley in northern Alabama.

During your internship, what did you accomplish or how did you make a difference? In what ways did you grow in your professional and technical skills?

During my internship I successfully accomplished creating three functional documents of research for the southeastern U.S and worked to create a better urban environment in downtown Birmingham. I helped Jim Godwin (Auburn University) to gather critical eDNA water samples along the Paint Rock river in order to aide a species in need of dire assistance, the hellbender. My professional skills have grown greatly during this opportunity. I gained skills working with a large company and being given a task to complete that will help the company as a whole. I gained vital experience working with political actors in the state of Alabama and insight into how politics affects both business and the environment in the state. I also learned a great deal about the environment of the state in which I have lived my entire life and the importance of conserving its environment and the struggle fought by conservationists everyday.

Describe a problem that you helped to solve at your internship. What skills or knowledge from your education at Sewanee helped you address the problem?

One of the problems that I continuously encountered was gathering pertinent information that would aid my research of the southeastern states. This problem resulted from many of our southern states not regularly updating their websites and information regarding their conservation practices. My Sewanee education has given me extensive researching skills and they were much needed for this project as I had to make many calls to state agencies in order to gather the information needed to finalize the reports I was asked to complete.

In what way were your teamwork skills strengthened?

I learned to work with a team of coworkers by participating in planning a meeting that included multiple organizations involved in conservation in the state of Louisiana. This meeting helped me to work with a team to accomplish a tangible goal and helped to strengthen my skills for organizing and communicating amongst team members. The meeting was organized to work towards creating a stream of dedicated conservation funding in the state of Louisiana in order to protect their complex environment of swamps and rivers.

How did your internship affect your career plans?

My internship definitely proved to me that I enjoy working in fields involved in politics and how it shapes our surroundings. The Nature Conservancy allowed me to work with conservation leaders in the southeast and to determine what challenges they face and in what ways funding could make a positive change in each region. This internship showed me that politics can be used to create positive change for good and that I would enjoy working in a field that potentially participates in that as well.

In what ways did your internship cause you to encounter people of different backgrounds from your own? What steps did you take to communicate effectively with such persons? What did you learn from such persons' perspectives?

I participated in fieldwork in downtown Birmingham that helped to revitalize parts of the city that had fallen into disrepair and needed a bit of help. Through this process I worked with a number of high school students. These individuals helped me to see Birmingham from a different perspective and helped me to better understand their community and the ways in which we can help them to improve their everyday environment. These different perspectives showed me that there is hope for downtown Birmingham and for humanity as a whole, as the old truly can be made new again and the broken can be fixed and made functional.

Words of advice for future interns (housing, transportation, etc.)?

My words of advice for future interns would be to soak it all in and to enjoy any field work that you are lucky enough to take part in. I had some great field work experiences from this internship and field work can be some of the most effective learning opportunities because you actually get to experience and touch and feel instead of relying on research and textbooks. Sometimes actively participating in something is the best way to feel involved and invested.

Words of thanks to your internship funding donors:

Thank you so much for providing this fantastic opportunity to me and to other students just like me! This internship enhanced my life and professional experience in so many ways and really gave me insight in what it is like to work in the professional world and to have coworkers and to work for a big

company like TNC. I gained experiences that I will truly never forget and a few great friends along the way as well! I honestly cannot thank you enough!