

This summer I interned for the Coastal Resources Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). I worked with a team of six doing field work for the National Wetlands Condition Assessment (NWCA) for the Environmental Protection Agency. This is a collaborative survey that examines the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's wetlands through a set of commonly used and widely accepted indicators. State biologists and private researchers all over the country are responsible for collecting data for this survey. As an intern for the Georgia DNR this summer, I was able to learn and be a major part of this survey. I spent many days throughout the summer preparing field work, carrying out field sampling, and processing and shipping samples to various labs across the country with my team. In addition to work for the NWCA, I assisted with routine field work including wetland edge sampling in tidal marshes, using a drop ring survey design and monitoring living shorelines up and down the coast of Georgia with DNR biologists. This work involved sampling in extreme weather conditions such as heat, bugs, mud, etc. Another component of this internship was preparing gear for sampling and data entry.

During my summer at the DNR I gained valuable knowledge and experience from biologists and administrators. I participated in public committee meetings, shadowed multiple biologists during their research such as water quality sampling, fisheries management and living shoreline monitoring. I also gained an understanding of what the DNR is responsible for and how they make decisions and manage our local resources. I was exposed to some of administrative aspects that the DNR deals with such as law enforcement, permitting, wildlife and non-game management. These experiences have really helped me to understand what I want to do in the future and what my career options really are. Talking to and learning from all of the people

working at CRD has taught me to work hard and efficiently and to make connections with people in the field of work that I want to go into. I had many people advise me to attend graduate school and if I was interested in working at the DNR to stay in touch and to get as much experience in the field as I could.

During my extensive work with biologists on the NWCA I learned the names of over 50 plant species and how to identify them, including the 14 jurisdictional plants of the Coastal Resources Division. I learned about and participated in water quality and soil sampling as well as vegetation sampling. I was responsible for filling out very detailed data sheets in the field under tough and sometimes uncomfortable conditions. Our field days started early and sometimes went on into the night. The sites that we were surveying were often difficult to get to and in the middle of nowhere. I learned to be flexible and understanding when things didn't work out or didn't go exactly as planned.

My time at the DNR has been extremely influential for my future goals. I plan to attend graduate school after, or soon after, graduation. My long-term goal would be to earn my masters in marine biology and to secure a well-paying job as a biologist for the DNR or similar government organization. I have gained a strong interest in working for the government because I feel that they are actually making a difference and doing research that really matters and affects people. For example, during my internship I shadowed a fisheries marine biologist and her team during a monthly set of trawls along the coast of Georgia. During these trawls, all of the catch is sorted, recorded, and measured. This is how the state of Georgia determines fishing regulations. I gained an appreciation and understanding for fishing and hunting restrictions and laws. I

appreciated that this research was ongoing and was actually being used for real change and management. So often I feel, particularly in the academic world, that studies and some research is somewhat pointless. I want to make a difference in the world and be a part of managing and really protecting this planet and I feel that I would be able to do that more in a government setting that directly affects people and their local ecosystems. I found it be relieving knowing that the DNR is actually making educated decisions, they are not just assuming how the ecosystem is doing and how populations of animals (fish, shrimp, etc) are actually doing in our waters. It would be nice if more people understood what the DNR did and why they make the decisions they do. That is why I am so appreciative of all of the amazing people I worked with and everyone that supported me and helped make this happen. I will always think of this summer with fond memories and motivation for my future.