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Sewanee Domain Management Internship

This summer, I was dealt a bittersweet hand. I was originally scheduled to report to the Yale-Myers Forest in Connecticut as a research intern for the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies in early June, but received some unfortunate news shortly after my departure. The school had fallen victim to a devastating fire that left most of the buildings on the campus utterly destroyed, ridding all of my fellow interns and myself of employment for the summer. However, things were bittersweet as I was on campus in Sewanee when I heard the news, and quickly got in touch with my advisor Dr. Scott Torreano who brought me into contact with the head of the Office of Domain Management, Nate Wilson. I was very fortunate to be able to successfully transfer my original funding for my summer in Connecticut to Sewanee to continue forward assisting Nate Wilson and other students at the University of the South under the aforementioned office and student research.

Throughout the course of the summer, my fellow interns and I were faced with accomplishing a multitude of tasks in various fields, ranging in everything from basic land & trail management to essential forestry skills. Jobs frequently encountered included ridding the numerous trails of the Domain of downed logs, excessive branch and understory growth, weedeating various areas including the dams to all of the lakes located on campus, “blazing” trails with tree marking paint to provide an unfamiliar hiker with proper direction, and rerouting areas of the Perimeter Trail that required much needed maintenance.

Between this array of weekly tasks, we were almost always given a larger project to finish over the course of several days until completion. This included using modern GPS and handheld computer based technology to cruise various compartments across the Domain, which allowed me to implement forestry skills learned in the classroom and apply them in a relevant context in the field. We used various tools and instruments such as prism gauges and hypsometers to determine merchantable timber and tree heights, respectively, in addition to more basic tools such as DBH tape to measure circumference. Using a GPS-based handheld, we were able to evenly take points over the course of a preloaded perimeter of our assigned compartment and properly record data that included tree regeneration (what species of sprouting trees within a certain circumference), submerchantable growth, and sawtimber or pulpwood (trees mature enough to be harvested). Cruising timber around Sewanee granted me the most experience in forestry and allowed me to put the skills I've learned in the classroom to good use in a relevant and productive matter.

Other projects included using the same type of GPS handheld and combining it with old deeds marked with perimeter boundaries and markers in order to follow the property lines of the University of the South and reapply boundary paint to trees and concrete monuments scattered around the Domain. This was easier said than done, as most of boundary lines and markers were located in steep, hard-to-reach locations on bluffs located on the edges of the plateau, testing our balance and our coordination in navigating such difficult terrain with unwieldy objects such as an

open can of tree-marking paint. However, once again the work was fulfilling, as we were able to test our navigational skills and apply them in a matter that proved useful to the University and surrounding private property owners.

In terms of research, I assisted Logan Stockton, a fellow forestry major, in his project of sampling 20 tree stumps from six compartments that were recently harvested and clearcut by the University for professor Ken Smith. By using a tool attached to the end of a chainsaw known as a tree-debarker, we were able to efficiently sand the sundried stumps to be able to clearly see the tree rings better in order to count them and gain a clearer estimate of their age, in addition to measuring their circumference and identifying the species type. Through our assistance, Logan was able to sample all of the trees necessary for Dr. Smith's research, and I gained a better understanding of what goes into some of the processes behind dendrochronology.

Overall, I was able to implement my knowledge of forestry while gaining new knowledge of land management and the operations behind maintaining such a large tract of property like Sewanee this summer, despite my unsuspected change in plans. In terms of stirring my career interest, I now have a greater appreciation and understanding of land management which is extremely relevant to maintaining a large tract of timber anywhere in the country. However, one of the greatest takeaways I had from my experience was that land and property management isn't just that, it's people management, which holds true in forestry and timber management as well.