

The Nature Conservancy of Alabama

The Nature Conservancy is a worldwide conservation organization that works to protect ecologically important land and waters for the good of nature and people. The Nature Conservancy was founded in 1951 on five core values which guide its actions every day: integrity beyond reproach, respect for people communities and culture, commitment to diversity, one conservancy, and tangible, lasting results. The Nature Conservancy works in all fifty states, with public and private partners, allowing it to lead the country and world in conservation. In the United States alone, The Nature Conservancy holds itself responsible for protecting the natural habitats of grasslands to coral reefs and addressing threats to conservation including climate change, fresh water, oceans, urban strategies, and conservation land.

This summer I interned for The Nature Conservancy in Alabama which is working to protect Alabama for people and nature, from the Gulf coast to the 18 river systems in Alabama, from bogs to prairies, to forests and canyons. I assisted and supported the work of Kellyn Garrison, the Director of Government Relations and External Affairs, who is engaged in a variety of state and regional policy priorities. I worked on issues ranging from statewide water policy, state and federal conservation programs and appropriations, Gulf of Mexico oil spill funding, and ecological restoration. I was responsible for doing legal and policy research, attending meetings and conferences, tracking legislation through the legislative process, taking notes and compiling summary reports, and drafting and editing outreach documents.

The majority of my time was focused on water policy research, including issues such as watershed planning, riparian rights and instream flows. This gave me a deeper understanding of

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Alabama environmental policies and gave me more exposure to a career concentrated on water from a political perspective, rather than scientific. As an environment and sustainability major I am required to take several policy classes and this internship will allow me to take what I have learned this summer and apply it to what I will be studying this fall semester in my Environmental Law and Policy course, as well as Environmental Land-Use Policy. I have become more experienced in monitoring and compiling media reports which also allowed me to understand the importance of following the main story and not getting side tracked by minor details. I was also fortunate enough to have a few field trips to experience various programs and projects that The Nature Conservancy has across the state of Alabama, a few days of field work, and time spent with other program staff to expose me to their work. This internship gave me insight to other ways that The Nature Conservancy works towards conservation, and I was fortunate to be able to spend some time with their new Urban Conservationist and hear about the different programs that she has started in the city of Birmingham. I also got a better understanding of what it would be like working at a large nonprofit organization.

I am extremely fortunate to have been able to work for The Nature Conservancy and could only hope to continue to work for them in the future. I attended my first large work conference, an annual coastal conference hosted by The Gulf of Mexico Alliance in Biloxi, Mississippi. The Gulf of Mexico Alliance brings together the top professionals and practitioners from all across the Southeast region to talk about Gulf issues and solutions. This was a great way for me to learn more about issues that concern the Gulf of Mexico that The Nature

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Conservancy is not directly focused on, it also taught me how important partnerships are, as well as a great place for networking.

This summer I learned more than I could have ever possibly imagined. I learned so much information about water policy, and the many complications that are intertwined with the issue of implementing state wide legislation. I also learned different water conservation practices used by states across the nation, different programs that are used to encourage saving water, and how far behind Alabama really is in regards to environmental actions taking place. But besides the new knowledge I now have for water and water policy, I also learned many invaluable lessons this summer that will prepare me for the future. My internship advisor, Kellyn Garrison, was on maternity for the first half of the summer which allowed (forced) me to work independently and manage my time well. I learned how important it is to stay on track and to continue working even when you don't necessarily have someone to report to every day. I also learned how important networking is and how important relationships are in the work field. The Nature Conservancy is so well respected and I truly understand why that is now, and much of that has to do with the people that work for the Conservancy and how they compose themselves and also how they interact with others.

After my internship with The Nature Conservancy I have realized that I would be more than happy to work for a large nonprofit organization after I graduate. I also learned that I am getting more and more experience in water related fields, both scientific and political and that it would be beneficial if I continued to concentrate on a field that I now not only enjoy so much but also am informed in. I never thought about ever going to Law School but after this summer I am

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very interested in doing so- there are so many environmental law cases that need to be fought for on the conservation side and I really am passionate about that. I learned that I am so blessed to have had the opportunity to work for such a well-respected organization and for such a talented Director of External Affairs and that I will forever be grateful for this summer and all the experiences I was given.