

The Yale-Myers Forest occupies 7,840 acres in the “Quiet Corner” of northeastern Connecticut. A small portion of that land is taken up by a conglomeration of bunkhouses and other camp buildings where researchers and the Forest Crew spend their summer. Forest Crew is comprised of Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies students who manage and maintain the forest, and the researchers come from several different labs, both from Yale and elsewhere. It’s a communal, laid-back atmosphere at camp, with everyone working hard outside most days and then coming back to a home cooked meal and games of bocce or Wiffle ball.

This summer I primarily worked with the Ashton Lab, studying Silviculture and Forest Ecology. Dr. Mark Ashton was an excellent, hands-on supervisor who lives close to the forest and would often come into the field with us if we needed help, and our research coordinator, Shannon, was the same. My fellow interns and I spent most of our days studying stand regeneration dynamics, meaning that we measured tree seedlings and understory cover in several different types of sites. The studies we were involved in were primarily long term, including one that has been in the works for over 20 years. It was amazing to see how this data is compiled and analyzed over such a long period of time so that we can understand the world around us.

A typical day for me usually involved waking up around 6 am to start work at 8 am. After eating breakfast together on the porch, everyone would go their different ways as the day began, and I would group up with the other research interns, and occasionally Dr. Ashton or Shannon. We would get in our 1995 GMC Jimmy and head into the field. The hardest part of our work was oftentimes finding the sites, which had been laid out years before. Even with GPS coordinates,

the flags we were searching for would often have been moved by mischievous animals or weather events. Once we made it to our plots, we would measure height, diameter, health, and other characteristics of the trees and plants, depending on which study we were assigned that week. Usually we visited three or four sites in a day, stopping to eat lunch when we saw a pretty spot. On rainy days, or when we had downtime between studies, we would spend time entering data, which was not the most fun task but is always a necessary part of any scientific project.

One of my favorite projects I worked on for Dr. Ashton was one studying the effects of hemlock woolly adelgid (a pest that affects hemlocks across the country) on sites placed across a range of topographic positions. We visited sites that measured 20 feet by 20 feet and marked out quadrants. Within these quadrants, we took a complete census of the height and diameter of every tree, and we counted every seedling on the forest floor. Then we assigned each Eastern hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) a health rating from one to four, one being in excellent health and four being nearly dead. I think I enjoyed this more than our other studies because I felt like I was given the chance to make judgement calls using my own knowledge of Forestry as well as past experience, and the immediate effects of what we were studying seemed much more tangible.

I joined a post-doctoral researcher and his assistants a few times over the summer in catching spiders and grasshoppers to stock in cages for observation across New England. I never thought a day would come when I would be riding in a car and willingly say “Here, I’ll hold the spiders”, but I guess I wasn’t anticipating my time with researchers in the Schmitz lab studying food web dynamics. Unlike the work I did for Dr. Ashton, which was all based in the forest, this

job required long road trips in order to travel across temperature gradients, which was always fun, even if we were unable to catch the species we were looking for, as was the case in colder Southern Vermont. I quickly overcame any inhibitions I may have had regarding handling insects, as we were usually up to our knees in tall grass and goldenrod hunting spiders or sucking up grasshoppers from our nets with tubes.

Over the course of the summer, there were several lectures and environmental movie nights in the classroom at camp. Quiet Corner community members were invited to join those of us who lived in the forest, and we heard from four researchers and experts about everything from bees to bats and White nose syndrome. Coming from Sewanee, this kind of engagement between the academic world and the local community is important to me, and I really appreciated getting to meet more people on these occasions. Besides that, it was great to continue to learn over the summer, something that other jobs haven't provided me.

Overall, one of the absolute most valuable experiences of the summer was simply getting to live and work with people who are older than me in the field that I've chosen to pursue. Forest Crew was comprised of graduate students from all different backgrounds, and hearing their stories reassures me that there's no one right path to follow if you want to end up in the environmental world. Besides remaining friends with everyone I met, I know that in the future I will both be able to take inspiration from them as well as look to them for help. I'm not sure if I have a clearer picture of what I want to do after Sewanee now, but I do know that I'm more interested in pursuing grad school at some point, and that I've seen that many different paths can

lead to a successful career. I learned a lot of new technical skills, as well as making invaluable connections. Along with all these things, I think I grew as a person, becoming more outgoing and sure of myself in both social and work settings. This summer was undeniably formative, and I'm sure I won't forget my time at Yale Myers.