

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service was commissioned in 1974 and placed under the Department of the Interior. As listed in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan, the primary goals are to enforce federal wildlife laws, administer the Endangered Species Act, manage migratory bird populations, restore fisheries, conserve and restore wildlife habitat, and help foreign governments with their conservation efforts. The agency also manages over 540 National Wildlife Refuges spanning over 95 million acres. One of such refuges, the Ernest Hollings A.C.E. Basin National Wildlife Refuge, is located in the coastal plain of South Carolina in Adam's Run and Yemassee. It covers close to 12,000 acres.

Over the course of the weeks I spent at the Refuge, I had a variety of responsibilities that proved to be educating, challenging, and ranged in a variety of fields which broadened my work experience, one of my goals for this summer. I lived in a trailer on the refuge and it was my responsibility for the upkeep of the trailer and grounds. I was trained in agricultural tractor use, all terrain vehicle and motorboat use under the Department of the Interior, a certification that lasts many years if I was to ever become an employee. I had a number of projects I was responsible for, from leg banding mourning doves and wood ducks, as well as surgically installing radio telemetry in female mottled ducks with the help of veterinarians. I was responsible for invasive exotic species control from such flora and fauna as Chinese tallow tree, Feral Hogs, Armadillos, Phragmites, and Sesbania. Some of my work was with other state agencies such as South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and Nemours Plantation, putting up new and taking down old wood duck boxes while surveying nest use and success rates of both Wood ducks and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, which also use wood duck boxes for brooding. A bottlenose dolphin survey was proposed but funding was unavailable and was postponed until next year. These are just a few examples of the projects and responsibilities I had this summer with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in the ACE Basin.

One of my favorite projects was the duck banding. Ducks are very smart, quick animals that are easily spooked, so the method of capture of most ducks comes from a rocket-propelled net that is shot over the birds on a baited site, trapping the birds harmlessly until they can be removed, sexed, aged, and banded. They are then released. This banding is used on many species of animals, and the recapture rate or return rate of reported birds killed by hunters can help to provide a population sample for overall population growth or health and regulations can be altered based upon the findings to ensure the health of the population. We would sit hidden in a blind well before sunrise, overlooking the wheat-baited site, awaiting the arrival of our quarry. This was particularly enjoyable for me being a duck hunter for many reasons: first of all there is no duck hunting in the summer so it is fun to sit and watch the birds work, although the purpose of the trip is different. Secondly, it is illegal to bait ducks, but we were not hunting so it is legal and I was working with the agency that enforces these rules. Thirdly, there is some chance that when I get around to hunting this winter, I have a chance of shooting a bird that I myself banded. But one of the best parts is knowing that I am helping to contribute to the health and regulation of this amazing wildlife stock so that my children can one day sit in the duck blind on a cold winter morning and watch the birds work the decoys like I have so many mornings.

As a resident of the Refuge, I was able to spend much more time working or just riding around the refuge after hours, when most of the animals become active. I felt so lucky to be in such a beautiful, wild place. One afternoon as I cooked my supper, I looked out my window and had 3 white-tailed deer and 6 wild turkeys scratching in the dirt 20 yards away, oblivious to my noodles boiling inside. These kinds of experiences made this summer special.

From my experience this summer I learned first of all that staying hydrated is very important. When you are wearing knee-high snake boots or hip waders, wool socks, and long pants in the swamp in 100-degree heat with 100% humidity, you can lose a lot of water very quickly. Fortunately I learned this early on and prepared myself for each day's task at hand. I

refreshed my timber cruising skills learned from forestry lab for a logging project on the refuge to reduce the forests to a 75 basal area. I learned the terrestrial and aquatic plants that grow throughout the coastal plain and which provide food or shelter for what kinds of wildlife. I learned how animals react to different forestry and silvicultural practices, and many wildlife techniques in the capture and handling of wild animals for research and removal. I marked boundaries surrounding the refuge to acknowledge that the rules and regulations of a Federal Wildlife Refuge pertained to the land within the boundaries of the paint. While doing this, I got to see some parts of the refuge that any normal person would be called crazy if they tried to get, but in the process, got to see some old growth forests, a variety of wildlife that live in only such places away from the influences of humans, and some pristine forests.

If you have ever spent any time in the coastal plain around an old rice plantation such as the refuge, or a swamp, you can attest to the insects. Mosquitoes the size of your thumbnail, yellow flies that will lift you off the ground, and more ticks and chiggers than one could ever imagine. It took some time, but one can get used to the bugs. This has made me enjoy being outside in the summer much more because I just do not notice the bugs biting me anymore. One of the low points of the internship if I had to pick one was boundary marking. Carrying a gallon pail of fluorescent yellow paint and a paintbrush along with a bark scraper through the woods for hours in heat and humidity was not the most enjoyable part, but the upside was the parts of the refuge I got to see as described above.

I learned a lot about wildlife, biology, the native and exotic plants and animals of our region, forestry and hydrology, all of which I thoroughly enjoyed. However, I also went to federal court with our wildlife officers, and this experience made me no longer want to consider being a lawyer or going to law school, although I have not completely ruled it out because of the variety of law practices. Secondly, working for the federal government there are a number of roadblocks and red tape one must go through for a very simple action, and it is a waste of time,

paper, and money. While I loved the subject matter and responsibilities, working for a private firm or landowner would be a more pleasant work atmosphere where things can be done more quickly. I did, however, have one of the best groups of co-workers I could have asked for; they all enjoyed everyone's company as did I and we worked well together.

One of my favorite parts about my internship this summer, and which led me to continue on with it after my pay was over, acting as a volunteer, was getting to use the skills I have learned here at Sewanee in my forestry, geology, and natural resources classes for actual jobs and real life situations. One specific time I really noticed this was cruising timber for a bid where some discrepancies had happened so it was my job to re-cruise the timber to double-check it. It came back to me like I had taken forest watershed restoration this past semester instead of 2nd semester freshman year. I knew the tree species that grew around me, what was native and what was not, and it gave me a sense of pride that comes with finally finding something you love to do and actually getting paid to do it. I could not have asked for a better summer internship or better people or atmosphere to work with and in. I hope to continue my studies and keep in touch with my co-workers and I am planning to volunteer this winter with them for bird counts and post-season duck banding.