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City of Bellingham Parks Department Volunteer Program Intern

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COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



Internship Title: City of Bellingham Parks Volunteer Program

Student Name: Carly Bell

Internship Dates: March 18th, 2022 - June 4th, 2022

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STUDENT SIGNATURE Carly Bell

DATE: 06/06/2022

Introduction

I started my internship with the Bellingham Parks and Recreations parks volunteer program in March 2022 and will end it in June 2022. Finding an internship was one of the hardest things I had done thus far in my school career, and once I saw this position I knew I had to try for it. I manifested it for what felt like weeks after I submitted all my paperwork to the interim parks coordinator, Ryan Robie. Then I got an interview, and I was so excited, and a little anxious to be honest. My interview was with Ryan and Shelby Kita who made the whole process very easy and friendly. When Ryan called me a week or so later saying I had gotten the internship, I was so extremely happy that an internship had finally worked out. The goals of this internship were to restore native habitat in and around our parks throughout the city. The internship at first started out as being only on Fridays and Saturdays. Fridays were the days we spent planning and preparing, and Saturdays were for the work parties we had spent the week planning and cleanups. Then Shelby told me about her school stewardship part of her job, as working with kids was something I have always been passionate about, she allowed me to help her on Thursdays and some Tuesdays. I had a few of my own personal goals, (1) was native/invasive species identification, and (2) was speaking to a large group of people. I needed 5 credits to fulfill the internship portion of my major, this is broken down into 150 hours of work, I completed 200 hours. I got to experience the community in a way I never have before as well as be a leader for them to look too. There were many challenges as well as some hardships along the way, but we always got through them.

Planning

Fridays were our days for planning, this was mainly done by Shelby or another lead. We would meet around 1:00 pm at the Parks Operations Facility (Park Ops.) and it usually consisted of me, Shelby, Ryan and the other intern, Zach. These days were when Zach or I would do our plant presentations sporadically when we had time for them and we would do a personal check-in with each other. After that, we would go over the plan for Saturday's work party and discuss any questions we had. The site visit was after this and we would go out to the park we would be at the next day and walk the whole area, we would point out the work areas and where everything would be set up. This was also my time to work on my plant identification, it was very helpful to see them in their natural habitat. Once the site visit was over, we would go back to Park Ops. and pull everything off of our tool list to pack for the next day. We usually finished our days around 4:30 at the latest.

Work Parties

Saturday's were our big work party days. We would meet at Park Ops. around 7:15-7:30 am and we would go over any updates for the day and do a little morning check-in, work parties usually consisted of Shelby, Zach, and I. We would do any last minute pack ups, go pick up coffee that was generously donated from Woods Coffee and then head to whatever park we were working in that day.



NSEA interns, Zach and I after the Little Squalicum Creek work party (My first one) outside the invasive truck after the party.

The first work party that I did was a joint work party with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA) at Squalicum Creek park, and consisted of about 100 volunteers. This was a pretty big event to be thrown into, but Shelby and Zach were more than willing to help me every step of the way. After setting everything up I shadowed this event and watched how he and an NSEA intern led this group introduction and explained everything flawlessly, it was a little intimidating. The work party then went into the actual work; usually consisting of removing invasive species, planting, and mulching these areas afterwards. I loved getting to learn about different restoration techniques and how to help keep our native plants happy and healthy to provide safe habitat for the wildlife in these areas.

The next couple of work parties threw me into a sort of different position, they were potting parties as we called them. This required me to learn how to pot and plant these myself and lead a group of up to 20 people on how to do it as well. We potted 1,905 bare root native trees and shrubs over two days (on two consecutive Saturdays), I was shocked to see how much work people could get done in just a short amount of time. These plants will live in the nursery on site where they can grow to be planted next work party season starting in the fall. These work parties were usually smaller, and it was nice because you really got to know the people that came to these events.



A small group of volunteers (some of my favorites) potting bare root plants at our Nursery Party!

Over 13 work parties, I worked with over 500 volunteers & we had a lot of regulars who joined us almost every Saturday and it was super cool to have that connection with people from my community. I had a few people I actually connected with and developed friendships that go farther than Saturday work parties. Most work parties were smaller than my first, consisting of about 30-60 volunteers every Saturday. On average we would remove about 10.6 cubic yards of invasives every week, and lay about 7 cubic yards of mulch. Throughout the internship, we also planted 209 trees and shrubs in our local parks and nature areas. I also got to meet a lot of influential people in the community, such as Julie Guy who was the person who really worked hard and fought for the new park in the cordata neighborhood, Julianna Park. On Earth Day, we even got to meet Bellingham mayor Seth Fleetwood. Earth Day was one of our largest days, coordinating about 120 volunteers and working with 6 nonprofits and other organizations. We provided lunch for everyone and the mayor gave a speech to everyone who came out.



Me and Zach at Julianna Park with Julie Guy who the park is named after. Zach is holding a giant blackberry heart

About halfway through my internship, my other intern, Zach, unfortunately had to stop the internship due to unforeseen circumstances. It was a really sad day for us all on his last work party, and losing him as a valuable member of our team was devastating. This loss was felt for about a week or two as it was just me and Shelby running these work parties and there were days it got hectic and messy, but rain or shine (mostly rain) we were always there ready to work. After a bit, Avery joined our team and they became a valuable member of our team. These days were long, not always bright and sunny, and what we were doing was hard work. Yet, no matter how I was feeling, our volunteers would start to trickle in with smiles on their faces and it always made me feel like I was doing something good.



Me and a volunteer holding the huge English Holly root we had just pulled using the weed wrench (orange tool pictured).

School Stewardship

When I started my internship, I didn't really know what I wanted to do in the future. I knew I wanted to work with restoration and our natural habitat and wildlife in the Pacific Northwest, but since starting these stewardships I might have found something even more rewarding. Teaching has always been something I was fond of, but I hadn't worked with kids in a bit and wanted to see if I was still any good at it. We worked with a lot of different schools, but it was mainly 3rd and 5th graders, and some 2nd and kindergarteners as well. I would meet Shelby around 8 at Park Ops. where we would quickly pack up the small amount of tools we would need for that day, and we would head off to whatever park we were going to that Thursday. As it turns out, teaching kids was more fun than I had remembered, they loved learning about restoration and why we did it. We taught the kids how to remove invasive species that threatened to harm or take over our native species, and every time they loved it. In the beginning we worked mainly at Fairhaven Park and the kids got to come back a few times to see the progress they had made on their section of trail and it was so cool to watch them be as excited as they were. Getting kids to

care about this stuff early on is very important, and it's a great feeling when you get to teach it to them and know they're actually invested in what I'm saying. Overall, I helped at 5 school stewardship events, and with the help of a total of 346 volunteers, we removed a total of 19.5 cubic yards of invasives.



This was the setup for school stewardship, the kids would sit and we would introduce everything, then after take their buckets and fill them with invasives!

Conclusion

This internship started off as just a simple lead volunteer position, as it grew into much more than this, I learned a lot about myself and it helped me focus on what I want to do in the future. My team consisted of some of the most hard working and dedicated people I have ever had the pleasure to know, and they taught me so much in just a short period of time. I started this internship to scared to talk to a group of 3 people I didn't know, and I am ending it being unafraid to speak to groups of 30+ plus people I don't know. I spoke to groups larger than 15 approx. 11 times, and this practice really helped me overcome that fear. This accomplishment may feel small in comparison to some, but for me this is a huge step moving forward in my educational future, as I can now publicly speak and give presentations and feel knowledgeable while doing it. 6 months ago, I couldn't tell you what any native or invasive species in the area were (let alone that himalayan blackberry was one of them), now I could point out almost every tree/shrub/plant on any trail in Bellingham. This was one of the goals I had set for myself for this

internship and with all the in-person species identification (about 15-18 hours) and plant presentations I completed, I'd say I completed that goal. Working with kids I found that teaching is something I think could possibly be a future job career, it taught me a lot about my own patience levels and it was really rewarding watching them be excited to pull out the invasives and actually care about the work they were doing. I also learned a lot about how far I could push myself, these work parties were every Saturday morning & we'd have meet times earlier than 7am some days. There wasn't enough redbull in the world. Some mornings after late Fridays spent working, or doing homework, those days could be really rough mentally and physically. I spent most days lifting/carrying 50+ pounds of invasives, tools, and anything else that was needed and we usually worked from about 7:30am-12:30pm (so many fruit snacks and granola bars were had) before lunch when we got back to the Parks Ops. facility. A good laugh with my team or a volunteer was usually all I needed to pull me out of the slump, but some days were just bad days. I never felt like I wasn't making a difference though, and it made every 6:30am wake up call worth it. I'm so beyond thankful to have had this opportunity as I have learned and experienced so much in such a short period of time, I can't wait to see where this new knowledge will take me in the future.