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## Washington Conservation Corps Crew Member

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# COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



**Internship Title:** Washington Conservation Corps - Crew Member

**Organization Worked For:** WCC/Dept. of Ecology/Americorps

**Student Name:** Peri Croan

**Internship Dates:** 10/5/2020 - 9/20/2021

**Faculty Advisor Name** Andy Bach

**Department** ENVS

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**STUDENT SIGNATURE**

*Peri Croan*

**DATE:** 4/26/23

Peri Croan  
Internship Report  
Dr. Bach  
Spring 2023

From October 2020 to September 2021, I served in an Americorps position as a Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) crew member. I worked with a crew of 4 others and a supervisor on a variety of different restoration and trails projects. This program is funded by the Department of Ecology and essentially crews are contracted out to various sponsors. During my term serving in WCC, my crew began as a 'spike crew', meaning that we would work for many different sponsors across many locations. We sometimes would travel somewhat long distances to a work site and stay for up to four days, either camping or staying in hotels or cabins, depending on the project and the weather. During this time we completed many different restoration projects across Washington. After about six months of serving in this capacity, my crew became a trail crew for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). For the remainder of the term, we worked mostly for the DNR doing trail construction and maintenance, as well as a few other types of projects. This position taught me many things, including a lot about ecology and the natural world, resource management processes at a state level, friendship and comradery with my crewmates, being humble and open to learning new skills and ideas, and getting out of my comfort zone. I am really grateful for this experience.

During the first half of my term, my crew worked for a variety of different sponsors. Some of these include the San Juan County Land Bank, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), various state parks, city governments, tribal governments, and more. Our main focus was habitat restoration. Our first project was with the San Juan County Land Bank. We stayed at a campground and during the day worked to thin out young Douglas Firs from a Garry Oak conservation area. This included felling trees with chainsaws and girdling. Another project that stood out to me was with WDFW, where we traveled to Whiskey Dick Mountain outside of Ellensburg to roll up miles of barbed wire in the shrub steppe that had been left over from fences from old ranches. In addition to unique projects like these, we also did a fair amount of native planting as well as invasive species removal, focusing mostly on Himalayan

Blackberry. We did other types of work as well, such as split-rail fence building and demolition of a few structures in Birch Bay State Park.

For the second half of the term my crew became a DNR trail crew. We mostly did trail maintenance and construction in Blanchard State Forest, Harry Osborn State Forest, and Walker Valley ORV Park. My crew worked on pedestrian, equestrian, and ORV trails. I learned a variety of trail-building skills and methods. I utilized and maintained many different hand tools such as pulaskis, McLeods, pick mattocks, hand saws, shovels, and more. I also gained valuable experience utilizing and maintaining power tools such as chainsaws, pole saws, and brushcutters. In addition, I gained experience in heavy machine operation, utilizing an excavator to load up toters to bring material up a trail. My crew also assisted in the construction of bathrooms at Griffin Bay Marine Park on San Juan Island. This gave me construction experience, where I did some woodworking, measured and located the proper locations for posts, dug post holes, poured and laid concrete, and more.

My experience in this position is significantly related to my studies at WWU. With Geography as my major I have been given an education that covers a broad span of topics, from the physical environment itself to the policies that govern it. Working with so many state and city organizations, I got a close look at the inner workings of environmental policy and resource management, and I also got a chance to deepen my understanding of ecological systems.

Something important that I took away from my time in WCC that has been further discussed in my classes at WWU is how problematic and inefficient natural resource management and conservation systems are. We were often doing work that had been acknowledged by officials as being somewhat pointless, and arguably harmful to the environment. The methods by which we were required to build some trails were wasteful and inefficient, and were clearly developed with the idea of making trails as quickly and cheaply as possible. Significant amounts of erosion occurred due to the violent nature of the excavators ripping out vegetation from hillsides in order to establish pathways for trails to then be built on top of. The main methods of trail-building that we used were not sustainable in any way. The presence of power tools in the forest is extremely invasive, by creating noise pollution and leaving traces of bar oil and gas behind. My classes at WWU that focused on policy and management also opened my eyes to the major flaws in natural resource management and conservation. While it may seem like certain laws and practices are in place to protect the

environment, economic growth is still the government's priority. The mere concept of conservation is about saving natural resources so they are available for human use. Plants and animals have been reduced to commodities. This became very clear to me during my time working in this field.

Another parallel between my internship and my studies can be observed in my deepened understanding of the physical environment and ecological systems. While I worked for sponsors who did not seem to actually care about conservation at all, I was also lucky enough to work with people who were passionate about the environment and educating and inspiring young people. I learned how to sustainably build equestrian and pedestrian trails and about the importance of trails and how they consolidate damage done by human activity in natural areas. I learned a variety of native plants and their medicinal qualities. I gained knowledge about the importance of salmon in all ecological systems. My academic studies acknowledge these topics, and my time working in this position gave me real-life examples of the complexity and beauty of the natural world.

My time serving in this position was very dynamic and I learned many important lessons from it. I am grateful for the experience to learn about the natural world around me in school, and then to be able to go work in the field and see all that I learned play out in front of my eyes. Going from sitting in a classroom every day to spending all day in the forest showed me the importance of being in my natural environment and how I benefit physically, mentally, and spiritually from it. Returning to school felt like being pulled away from where I am meant to be. Even though there were times during my WCC term where the work felt destructive, I feel lucky to have even been there. To remind myself that even though we are ripping native plants out of the ground to build a trail, it is viewed as a sacrifice that is being made on behalf of the rest of the forest. I feel lucky to have been in the sun and rain and mud during all daylight hours. To have seen the growth of plants that I planted and the deaths of trees that I felled. My time in school and in this internship have shown me that our societal constructs of nature do not truly regard nature as it really is. What I have learned is that our society attempts to separate humans and nature when we are, in fact, one. This knowledge is invaluable.