Summer 2023

Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Intern

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Internship Title: Educator at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Student Name: Miranda Sires  
Internship Dates: June 6th-August 18th 2023  

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STUDENT SIGNATURE  
DATE: August 18th, 2023
I started my internship on June 6th with Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. This is where I was an educator and I taught many school groups from different age ranges. My very first day on June 6th, I arrived at 9 am sharp and I went into the first day thinking we would just go over the dates and times I would be there and go over what was expected of me. That did not happen, instead they threw me in right away with teaching a group of 40 kids from the YMCA that were in the fourth grade, which I honestly loved. Susan Wood, who is the head of the environmental program there was with me, and I watched as she and Chandler, another educator there, took this large group of fourth graders around Padilla Bay and taught them about estuaries. We started off with ‘magic bag, which is a bag with a few items that go over the rules of the beach, like a shoe was in there to go over how thick the mud can be. Another item was a shell and that was to go over the animals that we would be finding at the beach and how to handle them with care. It was soon 4 pm and I thought surely the day was over, but instead I went to the team meeting where I got to meet everyone that works alongside Padilla Bay, and everyone was so welcoming and open to me joining and I am truly sad that my experience at Padilla Bay is over.

A typical day working at Padilla Bay usually starts off with a short meeting to go over what groups of children we have that day and what we will be doing with them. Depending on the size of the group meant if we would be using the microscope room with them or not. We usually did
if they were older kids and listened well. Once the children arrived around 10 am, we would meet in front of the building and talk about estuaries and why Padilla Bay is there. If the size of the group were smaller, then we would take our materials like a shovel and map of creatures that we would find at the beach down to our beach. If the group were bigger, we would have them go to Bayview state park just a little way down the road. Once we were at the beach, we would go over the rules, so they wouldn’t get stuck in the mud, and they would not disrupt wildlife and they would respect the environment. If we were using the microscope rooms, we would have the kids show us the cool stuff they found at the beach and we ourselves would collect the ocean water in a bucket and take some of the things the kids found so we could later then set the microscope room up with the cool creatures that were found. Sometimes we would also go looking for clams while the kids looked at life on the beach and we could then have some of the kids feed the sea stars in the touch tanks the clams.

After they have lunch, they come back up to Padilla Bay and we show them a video about Padilla Bay and then they can go through the exhibits. We have the microscope room, the theater room, the hands-on room and then the touch tanks which are always the kids favorites. I was often behind the touch tanks, so I had to learn what all the animals were, what they ate and how they survived, and some of the kids asked tough questions! The school groups would often leave around 1-2 and if we were open that day that would often mean I would have to go behind the front desk to greet people and cash them out if they bought something, or I would have to stay behind the touch tanks in case families came in. This wasn’t my favorite thing because a lot of the time it was slow so I would have to bring a book to read and felt like I wasn’t learning too much, thankfully majority of my time at Padilla Bay was with school groups though.
My ultimate favorite part of Padilla Bay was teaching summer camp. We had a week of art and science camp where we had the same 14 campers come in everyday for that week and we have them from 9-4. Every day was a new activity with them. One day we made journals and went down to the beach, another we walked the upper land trail and found natural things in the woods to make cool art. Another day we made friendship bracelets; I am still wearing the three that I was given! Camp was my favorite because you develop and connection with the kids and you learn their names and where they come from, it’s different compared to the school groups because we only see them for a few hours, and we never learn their names or see them again. We also did so many more fun activities with the summer camp group than we got to do with the school programs. After summer camp was over and the kids were leaving, I teared up a bit because I was going to miss them, and it was the most fun and the most learning process I had had at Padilla Bay.

I also helped worked on the green crab research and the eel grass studies that they were doing and also helped feed the fish in the aquariums a few times. I also rescued over 8 swallow birds and picked up many shore crabs. I am thankful for my time and experience at Padilla Bay. Not only was it fun and I made great friendships, but I also got to expand my knowledge of teaching and about marine life. I also learned that if I were to work with students in the future, I might like it more if I were to be with the same group rather than having a new group of children every day. I also learned that having a planned schedule often works but sometimes things don’t go as planned and that is okay too and to learn how to operate around those changes especially when they involve children. Learning how to make any experience fun and more engaging. I also found my voice and learned how to demand respect from children if they were disrespecting me as I was trying to teach them something because at first, I was nervous and quiet but, in the end, I had found my teachers voice.